

EVERY "BOY SCOUT" SHOULD READ THIS

AMERICAN WEEKLY INDIAN

BY COLONEL SPENCER DAIR

THE MYSTERY OF THE ARCTIC CIRCLE.





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The Mystery of the Arctic Circle or The Robbers' Round-up

By Colonel Spencer Dair.

CHARACTERS.

HELEN TRAINER—A young and beautiful girl whose father has mysteriously disappeared in the Northland. Being filled with an anxiety for him, she has persuaded her lover, Ned Sykes, to accompany her in the endeavor to trace her father and her brother.

WANOK—The brother of Helen who is carried away by the White Runners and is rescued from a horrible death.

TUPU—A trapper in the Arctic Region by whose cunningness

and intrepidity the Terrors of the North are finally tracked to their lair.

THE SIGHTLESS WANDERER—A man who, having lost his wife and two daughters is finally deprived of his sight and for fifteen years wanders along the shores of the Beaufort Sea and eventually meets the little band of ayengers.

ESQUIMAUX, TRAPPERS, ETC.

CHAPTER I.

THE SUMMONS OF THE WHITE RUNNERS.

"Ki-yi wo-ow!"

With startling suddenness this cry shattered the Arctic silence which held a little fur-trapping settlement at the mouth of the great Mackenzie river where it empties into Beaufort Sea.

And as the ten men and women, assembled in the main camp, heard it, their faces blanched and they gazed at one another in terror!

"It's the White Runners!" murmured a grizzled trapper, his voice seeming to come from afar off.

"But what should *they* want of *us*?" wailed one of the women, wringing her hands. "We've got no gold for them!"

"Ay, but it's not always gold they want," declared

the old hunter. "There's Tod and Enah that they took—and they didn't have pelts or gold!"

"Nonsense, Biram, Tod and Enah were caught on one of the ice floes and carried out to sea," asserted another inmate of the camp, from the recesses of the furs in which he was garbed from head to foot. "I, myself, saw them as they started out with their harpoons to bag some seal or walrus, so I know that when I tell you they were carried away I speak the truth."

"Ay, but I too, was on the ice that day—and I heard the cry of the White Runners far to the East of me," returned Biram. "And I hurried for my camp, leaving the two seals I had shot only half skun. In the morning I went out again—and the pelts were gone!"

"It was the White Runners that took Tod and Enah!"

The positiveness of the old trapper, who was a self-appointed leader among the little colony of hardy men and women who dared to brave the terrible dan-

gers and hardships of the far North in their effort to capture the valuable skins of the polar bear, seal and walrus, was accepted by the others as the truth and they huddled down into their furs as though they thought they would effectually conceal them.

"Heaven grant they're not coming here," moaned one of the women.

But scarcely had the prayer left her lips than again the cry rang out, more shrill and terror-inspiring because of its nearness!

"They're coming! They're coming!" moaned another trapper.

And a chorus of groans from his companions announced their agreement with him.

"Then let them come—we'll put an end to the awesome mystery these devils have surrounded themselves with and end their reign of terror once and for all!" cried a magnificent specimen of young manhood, springing to his feet.

"Get your guns, men, and stand by me—to give the White Runners a greeting of lead!"

The courageous words roused a responsive chord in several of the men and women and they rose to their feet, going each for his rifle.

But the preparations for resistance received an effectual check!

"Nay, nay, men, make no attempt to thwart them!" warned Biram. "They have the 'charm of the North'—and bullets cannot harm them! I—"

"Keep quiet, will you, you old fool?" roared the trapper who had proposed to defend himself and his companions against the terror-inspiring raiders of the Arctic regions.

"Nay, that I will not, Wanok," retorted Biram. "I am older than you—and know better. From my father and my grandfather have I heard tales about the White Runners—how they have a cave far off on the coast of the Beaufort Sea which is filled with treasures.

"And I know they never attack good people—some one among us has committed a terrible crime. As the leader of this band I demand the guilty persons go forth, at once, that the rest of us may be saved from the avenging fury of the White Runners!"

As he spoke, the aged trapper sprang to his feet and raised his fur-encased right arm, pointing toward the door of the camp.

"Go—whoever of you is guilty, go—before it is too late!"

But ere any one could move or even speak, there sounded a thunderous knock on the door and a voice cried:

"Biram, Shela, Tamak, Cora—come forth! In the name of the White Runners, I command you!"

CHAPTER II.

WANOK'S VAIN RESISTANCE.

As the men and women in the camp cowered from the dread summons, their terror mingled with amazement at the persons summoned by the White Runners, two of whom were women, Wanok sprang forward, rifle in hand.

"Now don't you wish you'd listened to my words and let us prepare for resistance?" he hissed at the trembling trapper who had but a few moments before bidden the guilty go forth—and had been himself called.

But the old man made no answer.

Again came the imperative knocking.

"Biram, Shela, Tamak, Cora—come forth!" repeated the voice.

His face ashen, the erstwhile leader of the camp turned toward the others.

"We have been called—we must go. It is our fate!"

Impelled by some mysterious power, the two women and the other man who had been named by the leader of the White Runners staggered slowly toward the door.

But before they reached it, Wanok leaped in front of them!

"Are you crazy?" he demanded. "Will you let a foolish tradition lead you to you know not what—probably your death?"

"Be human, take your guns—and defend yourselves! Quick, use the piles of furs as breastworks. Train your rifles on the door! When I open it—shoot!"

"Don't listen to him!" wailed Biram. "We have been called—we must go! Once the White Runners have called, they follow their victims to the death! Come!"

The others who had been summoned, however, were not so ready to lay down their lives in blind obedience to the superstitious fear of the White Runners and, finding that their fellows were willing to offer their lives to save them, they hurriedly grabbed their rifles, threw themselves behind the most convenient piles of pelts and awaited the opening of the door by Wanok, the muzzles of their weapons trained upon the casement.

"Fools! Fools!" hissed Biram. "In your rashness, you are bringing the Curse of the North upon yourselves—and all with whom you may come in contact.

"As one who knows of what he speaks, I bid you offer no resistance—and let those of us who have been called, go!"

His answer was the sudden throwing open of the door by Wanok.

As the massive barrier of tree trunks, brought to the

camp after much toil and hardship, swung inward, the young trapper bounded back, dropped to the floor and then cried:

"Fire!"

Crash! went the volley from the rifles, the intensity of the reports being all the greater because of their shooters being in the camp.

But instead of being greeted by shrieks of pain, there was the terrible silence of the North after the reverberations had died away.

Amazed—and rendered uneasy—by the failure of their bullets to find lodgement in any of the White Runners, the trappers stared at one another.

"I told you lead would not injure them," gloated Biram.

"Bosh! They've got frightened and run off!" retorted Wanok.

As he spoke, the young trapper, who had so bravely defied the traditions of the North, leaped to his feet.

"Come on, men! We'll give chase—and follow the devils to their cave of mystery!"

And without waiting to note whether or not any of his companions were at his heels, Wanok stepped across the threshold.

But ere his foot touched the snow outside, some object, like the paw of a polar bear, felled him in a heap!

"No mortal can escape the White Runners!" cried the voice. "Biram, Shela, Tamak and Cora, come forth!"

And all thought of resistance banished by the fate that had overtaken their rash companion, the four members of the camp filed solemnly through the door to the accompaniment of wails and lamentations from those left inside!

And as the last victim demanded by the White Runners passed from the camp, a white paw reached in and closed the door!

men crept to the door and, with infinite caution, opened it a few inches.

"Wanok's gone!" he gasped, then shut the door—and a second period of awe-inspired silence followed.

How long it would have taken the panic-stricken members of the colony to recover their usual composure and resume their dangerous tasks of stalking the polar bears and the seals and walruses will never be known—for some three hours after the raid of the White Runners upon the camp, there again sounded knocking upon the door!

"They've come back! Wanok brought the Curse of the North upon us by his resistance, as Biram said he would!" wailed one of the women.

But such was not the case.

Surprised at receiving no response, those on the outside tried the door. But it had been securely barricaded and refused to yield to their touch.

"There must be some one inside, Helen," exclaimed a voice. "You call to them."

Thus commanded, one of the trio who stood before the camp cried:

"Wanok, are you inside? Let us in, quickly! It's Helen!"

Amazed to hear a woman's voice, the occupants of the camp gazed at one another.

"It's a trick!" asserted some of them.

But the man who had opened the door and discovered that the body of the young hunter had been removed did not share the opinion.

"Wanok's not here!" he called, in answer.

"Then let us in, just the same, can't you?" responded the woman.

"Who are you?" demanded the trapper.

"Helen Trainer, Wanok's sister!"

This statement produced a tremendous sensation among the campers, its announcement seeming to drive away all memory of the raiders in the thought that the young, handsome and rash hunter, who had been so reticent about himself, should have a sister who would brave the dangers of the Arctic circle to come to him.

But the girl's story was to cause them even more amazement!

For several moments, however, the men and women inside the camp debated whether or not they should admit the newcomers. But at last they did, welcoming a tall girl, the beauty of her countenance hidden because of her wearing her raven black hair hanging over her face as a protection against the icy blasts from the Beaufort Sea, a young hunter who might have been a brother of Wanok, so closely did he resemble him in physique and a trapper, apparently just past middle age.

With mutual curiosity, the newcomers and the members of the trapping colony gazed at one another and

CHAPTER III.

HELEN'S STORY.

Too terrified by this display of seemingly supernatural power to move, the members of the trapping and hunting colony who had been spared the mysterious fate sat motionless for some half hour, then curiosity to learn whether or not Wanok had also been carried off by the White Runners began to assert itself.

For several minutes, the men and women exchanged opinions, in hushed, tremulous voices, then one of the

as Helen brushed back her raven tresses from her face, disclosing her exquisite beauty, beauty such as neither the women nor the men had ever seen before, they exclaimed in wondrous admiration.

But the girl seemed not to heed either their glances or their words.

"Where is Wanok? When did he leave here? Are there others with him? When will he return?" asked the beauty, in a veritable avalanche of questions.

At the interrogations, the men and women exchanged glances, none desiring to act as spokesman in relating so awful a story as the carrying off of the young hunter by the dread bogies of the ice.

Divining with her woman's intuition that something was amiss, Helen exclaimed:

"Oh, I know trouble has come to Ja—I mean Wanok," she hastily corrected. "Tell me what it is! One of you speak, *please* do, anything, even the truth would be better than your eloquent silence which makes me a prey to indefinite fears."

In the tone of the young girl, there was such pleading that the man who had opened the door to her replied:

"Wanok has gone with four others to the colony to the East. When he will return, I cannot say,—nor exactly where he went."

As he uttered these words, the hunter looked significantly at the rest of his companions.

Far from satisfied with the statement, Helen cried:

"You are concealing something from me—I can tell it by the constrained manner of you all. What is it? Surely a sister has the right to know?"

"But what proof have we that you are Wanok's sister?" demanded the trapper, parrying the question.

The words brought a flush to the cheeks of the fair girl.

"I do not know how I can convince you—if you doubt my words. Ned, Tutu, can either of you think of a way? No one has questioned the truth of my statement, heretofore—it is humiliating to have these people."

Ere her companions could reply, the spokesman exclaimed, suspiciously:

"A moment ago you started to call him by another name. Why was that?" Then, more to himself than to the others, he added: "Biram said there was one among us guilty of some great crime. It may have been this man who called himself Wanok."

"Wanok guilty of any crime—never!" declared Helen, her cheeks blazing and her eyes flashing.

"But if he had done nothing of which he was ashamed—or that was wrong—why did the man you say is your brother change his name?" demanded the hunter who had done all the talking for the campers.

Stung by the question which cast a cloud upon her brother's name, Helen looked from one to the other of her companions.

"Tell them your story—that's the easiest and the quickest way to convince them," declared the man whom the girl had addressed as Ned.

"I will!" asserted Helen, impulsively. Then turning to the trappers, she exclaimed: "The truth of what I am about to relate can be verified at any of the cities in Alaska through which I have searched and in New York.

"My brother's name is Jack Trainer."

At this statement, there were exclamations and an interchange of glances among the trappers so significant that the girl hastily continued:

"We had a father, Ambrose Trainer, who came to the Northland to purchase furs. He carried an immense amount of money with him, for he was very wealthy.

"In vain, Jack and I begged him to allow us to accompany him at least as far as one of the Alaskan cities. But he refused, declaring that the trip would be too full of hardships and dangers for us.

"Realizing that we could not change his mind, my brother and I, our mother had died a year before, a blow which caused my father to determine upon his wandering trip, made up our minds that we would follow him, not informing him of our intention.

"Nine months ago our father set out—and a day after he left New York, Jack and I took a trail for Seattle. And our day's delay caused us to be just too late. When we reached the city on the Pacific, we found that the last boat for the season had departed for the North the day before—and looking over the list of passengers, we found our father's name!

"Discouraged, we were obliged to wait until spring—but we took passage on the very first ship starting. From Sitka, we traced father to Nome—and then Jack insisted that he should go on alone, leaving me there.

"During our wait in Seattle, Jack's chum, Ned Sykes, this gentleman here," and she indicated her handsome young companion, "had joined us.

"As with father, so with Jack, when I asked to continue the search with him—he refused and refused even to take Ned with him declaring that it was his duty to stay in Nome with us and watch over me.

"A month after Jack had left, an Esquimau wandered into Nome—and to make a long story short, we learned from him that my father had stopped at the village of his people where he had made extensive purchases of pelts and then gone on.

"Something about his story aroused my suspicions and after much questioning and many gifts of tobacco, we learned from him that there was a rumor my father had fallen victim to the White Runners!"

At the mention of these terrors of the North who had so recently raided their camp, the hunters cried out in amazement.

"Do you know about their carrying off my father?" asked the girl, quickly, her face blanching and her voice quavering, in spite of her effort to control herself.

"We do not!" returned the spokesman. "But we know that the White Runners carried away the man you call your brother!"

CHAPTER IV.

WANOK'S ERSTWHILE COMPANIONS REFUSE TO TAKE UP THE PURSUIT.

With a cry of anguish, the girl buried her face in her hands and rocked to and fro.

"You, too, my brother?" she moaned, piteously. "Is it to be the fate of my family that we shall all fall victims to this accursed, mysterious band?"

"Not while Tutu and I have the breath in our bodies to prevent it!" declared Ned, springing to his feet and walking to the beautiful creature so racked with grief, and laying a hand on her shoulder as though to soothe her and dispel her fears of such a doom.

"Right you are, boy!" exclaimed the old trapper. Then turning to the campers, he demanded:

"When did Wanok fall prey to the fiends?"

At the question, Helen raised her head and stared intently at the man to whom her guide had appealed.

"Less than four hours ago!" he announced.

"Come, we may save him!" cried the brave girl, leaping to her feet. "How many of your band have gone in pursuit? Which way did the fiends go?"

Shamed at the thought that they had hesitated to give chase to the members of their camp who had been carried off by the White Runners when this beautiful young woman, unused to the rigors of the Arctic region had no fear of so doing, the hunter lowered his eyes, while his companions turned their heads away.

"Speak, man, speak!" commanded Ned.

But ere the trapper could, Tutu interposed:

"Don't press him, boy. I'll answer for him—not a soul has gone in pursuit!"

"What, four able bodied men allow one of their number to be carried off and not try to aid him?" gasped Helen, her voice disclosing mingled astonishment and anger.

"You don't know—you can't even realize—the terror in which people of the Ice hold the White Runners, child!" declared the trapper. Then an idea occurred to him and he asked, quickly: "Were any others of your party carried away with Wanok?"

"Yes, four." And rapidly the hunter named them.

"But I thought you said Biram was the one who suggested that Wanok was guilty of some crime," exclaimed Ned.

"He did not name Wanok as the guilty person."

"And no harm would have befallen Wanok had he not sought to protect Biram and the others from the White Runners!" ejaculated one of the women.

"That's like Jack—to try to aid his companions!" asserted the girl. Then she turned hotly upon the others: "Yet you sit here like cowards, never lifting a hand to rescue your people! What manner of men and women are you?"

Fearing trouble, Tutu interposed:

"Tell us how long Wanok has been among you?"

"Six weeks—and because he could shoot so well and was so strong and kind and brave, the others became jealous of him!" fiercely declared the woman who had told of Jack's efforts to prevent the capture of the hunters.

Sullen growls greeted this statement and the trappers fell to quarrelling among themselves only desisting when Ned asked:

"Will any of you men join with us in our attempt to rescue Jack and your friends?"

"And leave our women? The White Runners might come and carry them off, together with our pelts, while we were away. Besides, the Runners can cover two miles to our one—and they have five hours' start of us!" protested the spokesman.

If any of the men thought of yielding to the request, they had not the opportunity to say so for one of the women, yellow and ugly, cried:

"I'll let no man of mine go chase a fellow who uses a name different from the one he received at birth!"

"That's right!" chorused three of the other women.

And as though against such opposition they could not think of taking up the pursuit, the men shrugged their shoulders and threw out their hands—to indicate that they were helpless.

CHAPTER V.

THE TERRIBLE SNOW SLEEP ATTACKS THE BRAVE PURSUERS.

This aspersion upon the reputation and fair name of her brother made Helen speechless with anger, for the moment, and her face went deathly pale, though her eyes flashed like coals of fire.

"I'll tell you why my brother took the name of Wanok!" she hissed. "It was because he feared that my father had fallen victim to some of the roving bands of hunters who, having learned of his wealth and the

amount of money he carried with him, robbed him and then killed him—and he did not wish to prevent his chance for revenge by using his own name, which would have disclosed his relationship to our father, lest he be murdered by the villains who had done the other Trainer to death, as a matter of self-protection!"

Under the scorn and fury of the voice of the enraged beauty, the man and woman quailed—all but the girl who had praised the bravery of Jack in trying to save his comrades.

Getting to her feet, she approached Helen.

"If you will let me, I will go with you to trail the fiends who have carried off Wanok," she exclaimed.

It was on the point of the American girl's tongue to ask the reason for such an offer and in her anger at the hunters she was about to refuse the offer with bitter words when she beheld a light in the other woman's eyes which she readily understood.

"Surely, I shall be glad to have—it will be company for me," Helen exclaimed, at the same time reaching out her hand and placing it on the other's shoulder.

Ned and Tutu had been about to protest that the aid of a woman would be of small service but Helen's statement that she would enjoy the companionship silenced the words on their lips.

"What shall I call you?" asked the beauty, kindly.

"Mara."

"Then, Mara, make ready your pack for we cannot delay the pursuit longer," commanded Tutu.

And quickly the girl went about the task of getting her rifle, some of the dried meat called pemmican, together with other food, such as hard-tack and flour and extra furs.

At Mara's announcement that she wished to join the pursuing party, several of the women opened their mouths to protest, only to be silenced by a gruff word from the spokesman and holding their peace, they followed her preparations with dour glances.

But when at last she was ready, the woman who had refused to allow her husband to go, snarled:

"Mara, you're a fool! Even if you should find Wanok, which you won't, he never would marry you as you expect—he's too fine a gentleman! You'll only die tramping over the ice, starve or freeze to death! There are other husbands you could get—my boy will be here in the spring—and you can——"

"Be still, you old vixen!" snapped the girl. "Were that hulk of a Fedor of yours the last man in the world, I would not marry him to save my soul!"

"Besides, she won't have to walk," interposed Helen. "We have a dog sled and Mara and I will take turns riding on it."

As the girl had finished collecting her trappings, Tutu opened the door and the intrepid four, who, in addition to braving the dangers of the ice and cold, were about to take the trail of the Terrors of the

North, passed out from the camp never even looking back to notice whether or not the others were watching them. But they were and many were their comments as Ned and Tutu quickly stowed Mara's belongings on the sled.

Declaring that they wished to walk, the two girls started ahead with Ned while the old trapper seized the handles of the sled, cracked his whip and started the dogs.

But they were soon to be made to realize the peril of the pursuit!

"I've heard some of the old trappers say that the cave of the White Runners was to the East, on an island covered with huge mountains of ice," declared Mara, as they trugged along.

"Whereabouts?" asked Tutu, for he had soon caught up with the trio.

"That I can't tell you—but there is an Esquiman village thirty miles up the shore of Beaufort Sea and we can probably learn from some of them."

When the half light descended—for in the land of the midnight sun it is never dark—the quartette paused to eat.

"How about camping here for the night and then pushing on bright and early in the morning?" suggested Ned.

"H'm, I don't like the looks of the clouds," returned the trapper-guide, after a careful survey of the sky.

"But I think we'd make better time—in the end. Helen has had such a shock that she needs rest. It'll tax her strength to keep going—and she may fall ill just at the time when it is of the greatest importance that she be well."

In the face of this protest, Tutu offered no further objection to sleeping where they were and neck-tying the dogs, the men removed their canvas from the sled and pitched the tent.

This done, they all got into their huge sleeping bags and laid them down on the heavy furs which they had spread over the snow, and soon all four were asleep.

But the sleep came nigh to being the sleep that never ends!

As Tutu had said, the sky was threatening and after the pursuers had been slumbering for some three hours, the snow suddenly began to fall and as it came, there arose a mighty wind.

Growing in force each moment, with a sudden gust it swooped down upon the tent of the brave little band and carried it off!

The howl of the blizzard roused the old trapper and he sprang to his feet, as well as he could, encumbered by the sleeping bag as he was.

So dense were the snow flakes, however, and driven with such blinding force that beyond realizing that the canvas had been carried away, he was unable to see even the sled and the dogs, a few feet away.

For the moment, he thought of awaking the others, then he decided that it would do no good, as there was no more canvas on the sled and to change the position of the women would only be to get them covered with snow and the inside of their bags wet with it, adding to the already increasing cold, and he dropped down again.

Restless was his sleep, however until at last he felt a numbness stealing over him.

With all his will power, he forced himself to open his eyes, then loosed the lacings of his bag and got to his feet.

Covered by some three inches of snow lay his companions—and so still were they that the white mounds suggested nothing so much as the snow-mantled levations of new-made graves!

As the thought flashed to his mind, he shuddered, then hastened to rouse them. But though he shook each violently, he could not awaken them!

"The snow-sleep," he gasped.

CHAPTER VI.

THE MYSTERIOUS FIGURE.

Realizing that from their trying day and lack of being accustomed to the arduous traveling and bitter cold the terrible "Snow-Sleep"—from which many never awake—would take the greatest hold upon the beautiful girl and her companion, Tutu devoted his energies to rousing Mara that she might assist him with the others.

Seizing her sleeping bag with no gentle hands, he shook her violently, now and again varying the performance by throwing the bag heavily to the snow—and at last he had the satisfaction of feeling the body within the bag move of its own accord.

Yet not for an instant did he relax his energetic shaking and at last he heard a voice, so faint that it seemed to come from far away exclaim:

"What is it?"

But the trapper's answer was more vigorous shaking until finally the girl cried:

"Stop—you'll shake me to pieces. What's wrong?"

"Quick, help me get you out of your sleeping bag. The Snow Sleep has attacked Helen and Ned!"

Her torpid senses having gradually returned to normal, when she heard the dread words, Mara speedily crawled from her bag.

"Did I have it, too?" she asked.

"Yes—but don't lose valuable time in asking ques-

tions. Undo Helen's head covering and hold her mouth open while I pour some brandy down it!"

As the trapper was issuing these commands, he was drawing his flask from his pocket and quickly he poured a great dose of the powerful stimulant down the fair girl's throat.

"Now shake her, throw her about—anything to wake her up!" he ordered as, going to Ned, he repeated the process of forcing brandy down his throat and then shaking him.

Frantically the trapper and the girl worked but with no appreciable result.

"More brandy," called Mara. "I can hardly hear Helen breathe!"

Startled at the words, Tutu dropped Ned and hurriedly administered a second and still more sizeable draught of the liquor to the beautiful girl, and again Mara resumed her shaking.

At last, while the two who were working so desperately to save the New Yorkers were discussing the advisability of pricking the victims of the terrible sleep, Helen murmured:

"Go away—I want to sleep!"

"Thank heaven, she's saved! Thump her with your fists, Mara." And as he spoke, he rained a succession of blows upon the young fellow.

"Here, what are you doing? Who do you think I am?" drowsily demanded Ned, in the midst of the vigorous pummeling.

"You'll be a corpse—if you don't pull yourself together and wake up!" returned Tutu.

Yet so befuddled was the fellow that he did not recognize the voice of the trapper-guide.

"Quit your blows or I'll put a bullet into you!" growled Ned, struggling in his bag to draw his heavy calibre army revolver.

"Don't do that! It's I, Tutu!" shouted the guide in his ear. "Come, get out of your bag." And unclasping the hooks, the trapper went to the other end of the bag, seized it by the corners and dumped the man out, as though he were a parcel of flour.

And the action succeeded in thoroughly arousing him!

Springing to his feet, he demanded angrily:

"What's the meaning of this? Have you and Mara turned robbers?"

"Don't be a fool, Ned—we're just saving you from the Snow Sleep!" hastily returned Tutu.

"The Snow Sleep—my heaven, has it got Helen?" Ned gasped as the words recalled the stories he had heard of the dread slumber.

"Yes, but she's coming to—and with your help we shall have her all right in a few minutes."

Staggering as though he were a drunken man, Ned lurched to where Mara was throwing Helen's bag about and grasping it, in a blind frenzy, he shook it.

"Stop that! Stop that!" soon cried the girl and at last she aroused sufficiently to assist her companions in untying her bag, which was of different construction than the others, being provided with strings which worked from the inside that the bag might be drawn tighter about her.

At the first sound of the guide's voice, the sled dogs had jumped to their feet, shaking the snow from their shaggy hair and stood watching the strange antics of their master.

But their attention was soon distracted toward the South and they began to sniff the air suspiciously.

Had either Tutu or Mara seen them, their fears would have been increased all the more, but in their efforts to arouse their companions the humans were so absorbed that they gave the dumb creatures no heed.

Yet when Helen had been revived, she suddenly noticed the dogs leaping about and growling.

"Why are they acting so?" she demanded.

One look the trapper-guide gave them, then cried:

"Get your guns ready, every one. There's something coming—whether it's man or polar bears I can't tell. But we must be ready, in either case."

"Can it be the White Runners?" breathed Helen.

"It may be!"

The thought that they were about to be attacked by the very monsters of mystery of whom they were in search was the shock needed to throw off all effects of the Snow Sleep and instantly all four were alert, peering through the half light in the direction toward which the dogs were facing, growling and sniffing.

"Quick, Helen, you and Mara hide yourselves under the furs on the sled, placing yourselves in such positions that you can use your guns!" commanded Tutu. "Ned and I'll creep up behind that hillock and see what it is."

Waiting only long enough to assist the women in covering themselves, the two men dropped on their bellies and began to crawl over the snow to a hummock of snow covered ice some two rods away.

But when they were less than half way to it, the dogs suddenly began to bark viciously.

"At our backs! At our backs!" cried Mara in warning.

And turning, the men beheld a figure stumbling toward them, leaning on a spear!

"You cover him with your rifle while I creep up on him, Ned!" whispered Tutu. "If he makes the slightest hostile move, drop him!"

Quickly the men took their tasks and as the trapper guide got nearer and nearer to the oncoming figure, all four of the little band were amazed that he seemed not to see them.

But soon the mystery was explained.

Pausing to sniff, the figure suddenly called in a dialect which Tutu fortunately understood

"Whoever you are, I mean no harm. I am blind!"

CHAPTER VII.

THE AMAZING TALE OF THE SIGHTLESS WANDERER.

Unable to believe that any one could wander through the awful dangers of the Arctic regions when powerless to see, Tutu cried:

"That can't be the truth! Try no tricks. As you value your life, tell me whether you have any companions that are waiting while you reconnoitre?"

"Companions, no I have none!" And the bent figure emitted a laugh that was awful to hear.

"Nonsense, a blind man could not roam about alone—tell me who you are and what you and your people want—or I'll drop you in your tracks!"

"If you don't believe me, come and look at my eyes!" retorted the lone man.

"Go, Tutu, he may be telling the truth—and if he is, he certainly needs our assistance," called Helen.

At the sound of the fair girl's voice, the bent figure cried, eagerly:

"Have I really found the band of avengers?"

Before answering, however, the trapper-guide leaped to his feet and ran up to the old man, then peered into his face.

"He speaks true—he is blind!" he exclaimed. Then to the new arrival, he asked: "Who are you?"

"Men call me the Sightless Wanderer."

"But how can you go about among the ice and crevices, to say nothing of the bears?" demanded Ned, having joined Tutu, who put his question into the argot of the blind man.

"By my smell and my hearing. The wild beasts seem to know that I am harmless and leave me alone. But tell me, are you the band of avengers?"

In amazement, the four intrepid people who had determined to brave the dangers of the Far North in the search for their loved ones—or at least tidings of them—gazed at one another. That a creature, calling himself the Sightless Wanderer should have learned of their purpose, seemed incredible to them but Helen put an end to their surprise by saying:

"Ask him what he means, Tutu?"

Quickly the guide obeyed—and as he interpreted the answer, his auditors were even more astounded than by the question.

"He says he has heard that a woman and two men have set out to find the lair of the White Runners and

that he wants to join them because he has been to their cave!"

"Oh, ask him where it is?" demanded Helen, breathlessly.

Hurriedly Tutu put the question and translated the reply:

"On an ice covered island, about ninety miles beyond the Esquimaux village. That's——"

But he was interrupted by the blind man, and, pausing, soon continued:

"He says that the island can only be approached by boat for a mysterious warm current keeps the ice away from it!"

"Impossible!" exclaimed Ned. "That statement shows that the man is either insane or is seeking to lure us into some trap. Tell him to begone!"

"No, no—let him tell us his story. This is the land of strange things, Ned. Tutu, ask him to tell us all he can about the cave."

And later, the intrepid little band of avengers rejoiced that the girl had countermanded the order of her companion to dismiss the Sightless Wanderer!

Briefly the guide spoke to the old man and then for several minutes the latter talked in reply, his many gesticulations, some of which were toward his eyes, telling the three who could not understand his patois that he must be explaining the cause of the loss of his sight.

As his narration proceeded, the hostility which Tutu had manifested toward him vanished and when the bent figure finally ceased speaking, he handed him a piece of tobacco—an action more eloquent than words, in the Arctic regions, proclaiming as it did that the giver wished the recipient to be his friend.

"What is it? Quick, don't keep us waiting!" commanded Helen, noting the change in the trapper.

"He says that fifteen years ago he and his family—a wife and two lovely daughters were travelling to the Esquimaux village to the East of here when his womenfolk were stolen from him, one night while he was away hunting seal.

"In some manner—which he does not seem desirous of explaining—he managed to trace the White Runners, for he learned it was these Terrors of the North who had kidnapped his dear ones, to their cave.

"So impregnable was it, however, that he was forced to give up his attempt to enter it and set out to go back to the Esquimaux village to get assistance in men and boats to help him raid it.

"Ere he reached there, however, he was attacked one day by what he supposed was a polar bear, caught as he was some distance from his boat, in which were his weapons and food, while looking over the ice floe for some passage for his boat.

"But he soon learned that the creature was not a polar bear! It rose on its hind legs and with a sharp

piece of walrus tusk, stabbed him in his eyes, then left him, warning him to beware not to incur the wrath of the White Runners a second time!"

Ned was still sceptical of the truthfulness of the Sightless Wanderer; however, and he asked:

"Why did the fiends spare his life, if they knew he had learned the whereabouts of their lair?"

"That's just what I asked him," smiled Tutu. "And he told me that the only reason he can imagine is that either his wife, or one of his daughters, all of whom were wonderfully pretty, had heard the members of the dread gang talking about his visit to their island and had persuaded them at some great personal sacrifice, to spare his life. Having promised this, he believes they hit upon the horrible plan of blinding him and leaving him on the ice floe, confident that he would either walk into some crevice or fall the prey to some hungry bear."

"Well, why didn't he?" scoffed Ned, still unconvinced.

"Because he said he had the miraculous good fortune to be picked up by a party of Esquimaux after he had wandered about in a small circle for almost twelve hours!"

"Does he take us for fools?" snapped Ned.

But before the interpreter could reply, the blind man said something and with a smile, Tutu exclaimed:

"He says that, thinking from the tone of your voice you doubt him, he will lead you to the cave which has long been the mystery of the Arctic circle!"

CHAPTER VIII.

NED INCURS THE ENMITY OF TUTU.

"Lead us into a trap, more likely!" growled the young New Yorker. "How could a man who cannot see wander about in this the most dangerous of all countries, for fifteen years? Unless, of course, he is shamming his blindness."

Irritated by the continued disbelief in the story told by the aged man, Tutu snapped:

"Look for yourself, if you think he hasn't lost the sight of his eyes!"

"I will," retorted Ned. And quickly he approached the silent figure, peered into his blank orbs for a moment—and then flashed a match so close to the eyes that the man leaped backwards.

An angry exclamation rushed from the lips of the Sightless Wanderer while Helen and the others gasped in horror.

"What did I tell you?" gloated Ned. "He's sham-

ming! No one could have sensed the presence of light so quickly and the fact that he jumped backwards shows that he saw it! The man is an impostor! He has probably been sent on to detain by any sort of wild talk until his companions can come up and kill us! See, he wears white furs—I'll wager he is one of the White Runners!"

This speech seemed to anger the trapper guide, while at the sound of the angry voice, the blind man raised his right hand toward the sky, talking rapidly.

"What's he saying?" demanded Helen.

"That I will not tell you—it would not please Mr. Sykes!" And then turning full upon the scoffer, he exclaimed, with a vehemence which astounded all his hearers: "If I had known your true nature, I never would have allowed you to be a member of any party I was guiding. As it is, I have given my word to take you to the cave of the White Runners—and I will! But mark you this—ask me no favours and keep out of my way at all times!"

"There are mysteries which such as you never can understand. Among the Injuns with whom I have lived and hunted, a blind person is as sacred as an insane one—and from this man's story, the same respect and sympathy for them apparently exists among the Esquimaux.

"Besides, the loss of his eyes has been more than recompensed by the Great Power Above by the marvellous development of his senses of smell and hearing—he smelled the match and that's what made him jump back.

"But mark my words, if this man accompanies us—"

"And he will—I insist upon it!" interrupted Helen.

"Then before we have accomplished our purpose, I'm willing to wager the amount of pay you have agreed to give me you will have proof of his power of sense!"

Yet, as he spoke, with a solemnity and positiveness that could not but impress even the sceptical New Yorker, he little thought that the display of the Sightless Wanderer's powers would be the saving of Ned's life!

Still smarting under the doubt of his young companion, Tutu turned to Helen.

"With your permission, we will give this man something to eat and then set out on our journey to the Esquimaux village. Banta, that's what he tells me his real name is, thinks that we shall have bad weather very soon and advises that we proceed with all possible haste."

"Surely feed him. Come Mara, we will start a little fire and make some coffee."

"No, you musn't. We shall need the few cakes of peat we have much more later than we do now," protested Tutu. "When we get to the village, we can buy from them."

And putting his arm through that of the Sightless Wanderer, the trapper led him to the sled where a cold breakfast was quickly made, ready and eaten, the dogs being fed at the same time, and as soon as the meal was finished, Tutu harnessed up the dogs.

"Banta and I are going to walk with the leader," he announced. "Helen, you and Mara can take turns riding on the sled, Sykes, you'll have to hold the handles."

As though it were not enough to show his anger at the young fellow by calling him by his last name, when they had been such good comrades up to the time of Banta's coming, his order for him to hold the handles of the sled while it bumped and slewed over the ice was proof positive of his changed feelings—for the task is one which requires training and skill.

Realizing this, Mara was about to protest, when Tutu gave the word to his dogs to start and as they obeyed, he and the Sightless Wanderer set out, one on each side of the leader which had been imported from Siberia.

Vowing to himself that he would prove he was equal to the difficult task which had been set him, Ned was obliged to devote his constant attention to the jumping handles of the sled but occasionally he raised his eyes towards Banta and noted that he picked his way with almost the same cleverness as the Siberian dog.

"Do you believe that man's story, Mara?" he finally asked, when the girl was helping him over an unusually rough piece of ice by taking one of the handles.

"Certainly."

"But why? Have you ever heard of the Sightless Wanderer?"

"Certainly—no one who has been on the Beaufort Sea for any length of time has not. But I've never seen him before—though Biram has met him. And Wanok met him one day but not being able to converse with him, he did not learn who he was until he returned to the camp. But when he reported his strange meeting and was told Banta's story, he was almost crazed and searched for him for two weeks, indeed, he had only been back about two days before the coming of the White Runners."

This statement, uttered in the simplicity of one who is merely repeating a well known truth, impressed Sykes as no amount of arguing or discussion of the blind man's powers could have done and he lapsed into a shamed silence.

"I think I'll go up ahead and ask Tutu's and Banta's pardon for doubting their words," he exclaimed at last. "That is, if you will take the handles."

"I'll do that willingly enough—but if I were you, I wouldn't go near them," returned Mara.

"But why not? As I've wronged the man, why should I not tell him I'm sorry?"

"Because men—and women—of the North are different from you of the Southlands. Truth is the one

thing they cherish—that is, all but the Esquimaux and the White Runners and—and the men from the States who come up to buy things. As you have doubted them, they will never forgive you.”

The inclusion of his fellow-countrymen in the category of persons who could not be believed by the simple-hearted folk of the North brought a flush to the young New Yorker's face as he said:

“Then I suppose they will be venting their enmity upon me in all manner of ways, even to seeking my death?”

“No—you've hired Tutu, he's given his word, and he'll be loyal, rendering you strict duty and service. But he will never again be friendly with you.”

“Well, so long as his anger toward me does not mean that he will try to thwart Helen in her purpose, I don't mind so much,” returned Ned.

But nevertheless, he was unusually silent during the hard journey over the ice that ensued before Tutu called a halt for food.

Unharnessing the dogs, the men had just begun to eat, when the Sightless Wanderer cried to the trapper-guide:

“There's a bear nearby, be careful! He's different in smell from the ones we usually have around the Beaufort Sea!”

CHAPTER IX.

ATTACKED BY A COLLARED BEAR.

Scarcely had the trapper-guide finished translating the words of their strange companion than the dogs set up a vicious sniffing and growling, straining at their leashes as they leaped toward the shore.

The terrible monotony of the snow and ice had been broken just before the guide had called the halt by the sight of a cluster of scrub pines in the distance, where the shore of the Beaufort Sea makes a bend to the very edge of the Arctic Circle and it was toward this that the dogs were striving to go.

Quickly picking up his glasses, Ned scanned the rugged trees, then suddenly gasped:

“There's a bear just crashed through the branches. He's the biggest thing in the bear line I've ever seen—and he's heading direct for us!”

“Smells the reindeer steak Helen's been cooking,” grunted Tutu. “Blood will draw a bear for miles.”

“How far is it to those bushes?” inquired the beautiful girl.

“All of a mile,” interpreted Tutu, after he had asked the question of Banta.

“And the beast can scent the blood that far, how awful!” cried Helen.

But her exclamation was forgotten in the announcement of Ned, who had picked up his glasses again:

“Why, the monster has something that looks like a white collar round his neck!”

Quickly the trapper-guide repeated this information to the blind man, then commanded:

“Look to your guns, everybody. It surely is a collared bear, one of the very few on this side of the North Pole, though they're almost common in Siberia—and for strength and ferocity there's nothing like them, especially when they're hungry!”

And within a few short minutes, the members of the intrepid little band who were braving the terrible dangers of the North on a mission of vengeance which would free the few inhabitants of the land of ice of the ever constant bogies, the White Runners, were to learn all too well the truth of these words!

Now rising on his hind legs, the better to sniff the direction of his intended meal, now on all fours, covering the interval between the anxious little band and the scrub pines with incredible rapidity, his leaps seeming to gain him a rod at a time, the bear bore down upon the group.

“Everybody hold their fire until I give the word!” commanded Tutu. “This devil is surely hungry—and a collared bear is worse than a grizzly ever thought of being. You've got to hit him square in the heart to stop him—and then it's sometimes a quarter of an hour before he drops.

“Sykes, you stand out on the West end, about a rod. Mara, you stand next and Helen will be by me. Remember to hold your fire until I give the word—but when you do shoot, try to make every bullet count and to pump them out as fast as you can work your magazines!”

Trying to control their excitement and anxiety, for neither of the New Yorkers had ever seen any big game before, let alone shot at any, their hands trembled as they held their guns at a ready.

“A lot of help they'll be to me!” growled Tutu, under his breath. “I wish Banta could see to use a gun—but perhaps Mara will be of some account. If she isn't and master collar takes it into his head to rush me after I've shot at him, I'm afraid I shall be in a bad way.”

Not long did the trapper-guide have to worry over the fact that the whole responsibility for protecting the party lay upon him, however!

Less than three hundred yards away was the monster—and as he drew nearer and nearer to the spot whence the odor of blood was wafted to his super-sensitive nostrils, his speed seemed to increase.

Straight upon Ned was he bearing down and as the chap realized the fact, he lost all control of himself and blazed away with his rifle!

Suppressing his comment until he had seen whether or not the shot went wild, Tutu, to his amazement, saw the bear suddenly stop and make a grab for one of his front paws, then emit a snarl of anger so loud and furious that it was distinctly audible to the little group.

"I hit him! I hit him!" shouted Ned, joyously.

"Yes—and worse luck!" retorted the trapper-guide. "Instead of having a hungry bear to deal with, we've got a pain maddened devil! Why couldn't you wait until I gave the word to fire, as I told you?"

"All of you take aim, train the muzzles of your rifles upon the brute. When he rises, raise your guns and then fire at the left side of his breast, close to his paw!"

Again however, Sykes disobeyed.

Growling and spurling in bloodcurdling fashion, the infuriated monster leaped toward the group—but without once rising to his hind legs. And as before, he was headed for Ned.

Unable to bear the strain, when the big brute was some forty feet away from him, the fellow fired the second time.

For some reason, the bear had turned its head just as Sykes pulled the trigger and the bullet ploughed a furrow across the bridge of his nose!

But the shot was the means of giving them the chance for which Tutu had ordered them to wait!

With a terror-striking roar, the monster reared on his hind legs, striving to wipe the blood which gushed from the wound away from his nostrils.

"Now, everybody—fire!" cried the trapper-guide.

Crash went the volley from the four rifles—and to the delight of all, one of the bullets broke the brute's left front paw, for it dropped to his side.

But only for a moment did their joy last!

Growling and scattering a rain of blood all about him, the beast rushed forward, on his hind legs and to the terrified women, he seemed to be mountain high!

"Fire again!" shouted Tutu—and again the rifles barked.

To all appearances, however, not a bullet had taken any effect.

"Again! Again! Keep on until you've no more shells left in your magazines! We've got to stop him some way—if we're going to save our lives!" yelled the trapper-guide.

But so excited were the women and Sykes that though they obeyed, their shots went wild!

Just when it seemed as though he must grapple, hand to paw with the monster, Tutu saw his Siberian leader leap forward and bury his teeth in the bear's throat!

"Go to him, the rest of you dogs!" he shouted; then holding his fire, he ran toward the brute.

"Come back, oh, come back, Tutu!" screamed Helen, in alarm. But the trapper paid her no heed.

The attention of the monster was for the moment at-

tracted by the dogs—and taking advantage of the fact and, never thinking of the awful risk he ran, the guide rushed upon the struggling mass of dogs and bear until he was within four feet of them, then pointed the muzzle of his gun at the monster's heart and pumped his magazine empty!

For a moment the bear staggered as bullet after bullet ploughed its way into his heart, then with a snort of rage, he struck for his new foe!

The instant he had emptied his rifle, Tutu had jumped back, however, drawing his pistols as he did so—and ere the monster could reach him, the terrific dose of lead proved too much and he pitched to the snow, the dogs leaping upon him as he fell!

CHAPTER X.

A FRESH DANGER FORCES THE AVENGERS TO LEAVE BEHIND A VALUABLE PELT.

Eager to take part in the killing, Ned dashed forward, knife in hand, evidently determined to plunge it into the bear's hide till he had succeeded in cutting his throat.

But before he could reach the monster, Tutu was upon him, seized him roughly by the nape of the neck and jerked him backward!

"You fool, don't you know the beast would tear you to shreds before you could so much as stick your knife into him? Look at the way he's ripping up those dogs!"

With his blood ebbing onto the white snow in small streams, the brute, seemingly having recovered the use of his wounded paw, rose to his haunches and, in a final, desperate attempt to wreak some injury upon his vanquishers, seized the Siberian leader and tore him to shreds with his wicked claws!

But the act was the bear's last and ere he could grab another of the animals, he fell back, dead!

Yet had he tried, he could not have rendered them a worse injury—short of the death of one of the members of the party—than in killing the dog of all the team the most necessary to them!

"That means I'll have to play leader," snarled Tutu. "There isn't another dog in the team trained for the work—but I don't believe we'll have many of them to use, they look pretty badly done up!"

And such was, indeed, the case.

Of all the fine team, not a dog was there that did not carry the marks of the collared bear's furious attack and, now that the excitement was ended, they limped about, whining and moaning:

Cursing the luck which had brought the monster upon them until they could, at least, reach the Esquimau village, where they might be able to pick up other animals, Tutu examined each dog carefully.

"How many are there we can use?" asked Mara, who alone of those watching, understood the seriousness of their position.

"Not more than four—perhaps not but three!"

"What'll you do with the others?" demanded Ned.

"Put them out of their misery," grimly returned the trapper. And, suiting his actions to his words, he sent a bullet from his revolvers into each of the dogs until only four remained. "By taking this one on the sled and nursing it, I think I can bring it round," he declared.

"But where will you put Helen?" protested Sykes.

"On her feet!" snapped Tutu. "She's well and sound—and even if we don't move more than half a mile a day, she'll be obliged to walk. I'll need this dog!"

The young New Yorker was about to make a more vigorous objection, when the beautiful girl herself prevented by exclaiming:

"Of course, I'll walk—and gladly. If Mara is able to, I surely ought to be because I'm taller than she!"

The folly of rating one's ability to withstand the rigors and difficulties of trudging over Arctic ice by one's size was passed unnoticed by the trapper and the woman from the camp and quickly both busied themselves putting salve on the injured dog's wounds, then bandaging them and finally covering him with furs.

"If you make such a fuss over a dog, what would you do if it had been one of us who had been injured?" asked Ned, sneeringly.

"I've seen times when a dog's life was worth four men—when it was necessary to run to a settlement to get grub and help!" retorted the trapper-guide significantly and the young fellow did not press his question.

"Going to take the pelt?" asked Mara, when the dog had been made as comfortable as possible.

"Oh, I'd like it ever so much!" exclaimed Helen.

"Then we'll take it—no, I reckon we won't, after all!" announced Tutu, sweeping the ice to seaward.

"But why not, Helen wants it?" declared Ned.

"And I'd like nothing better than to get it for her—if circumstances were different," returned the guide. "But if we don't get out of here quickly, we shan't live even to talk about it."

"What do you mean?" asked the fair girl, turning to look in the same direction as the guide.

"Take Sykes' glasses and you will understand," rejoined Tutu.

Instantly the girl did so and as she swept the seemingly unending expanse of humpy ice, she cried:

"Why, I can see at least five big yellow things moving along!"

"Exactly—polar bears!" announced the guide, significantly.

"But what harm can they do us?" demanded Ned.

"Simply eat us up!" retorted Tutu, drily. "They've been attracted by the smell of blood from the collared bear and the dogs, possibly from the deer meat, though I doubt if the odor would stand much show against the other and stronger. But whichever it is, the polars have scented it—and they're coming as fast as they can."

"I've had all the bear fighting I want for one day, especially when the odds are five polars to one white man! but we'll get it, if we don't leave in a hurry!"

The thought of another encounter with the monsters of the North, even though they were less ferocious than the brute they had just killed, was no more welcome to the others than it was to the guide and willingly they lent their hands to getting the dogs into harness and the sled under way again.

From time to time during the fight with the collared bear, Tutu had announced its progress to the Sightless Wanderer and when all was ready to start, he moved over to where the guide was standing, the dog-harness over his shoulders.

"I am better fitted for such a task than you," he exclaimed in his native tongue, which Tutu translated for the benefit of his companions, as before. "I can hear and smell the dangers in the footing. Be quick—and put the harness over *my* shoulders!"

Tutu, refused, emphatically, however, saying:

"I am younger and stronger than you, Banta, and besides, you can give me the advantage of your knowledge by walking ahead of me."

And, with Helen walking at the side of the Sightless Wanderer and with Sykes at the handles and Mara trudging beside first one and then another, the little band of avengers once more resumed their way—and when they paused, at the end of some twenty minutes, and looked back, they beheld five huge polar bears tearing the carcass of the collared, at times fighting among themselves!

CHAPTER XI.

TUTU SAVES HELEN FROM AN EMBARRASSING SITUATION.

So uneven was the ice, now suggesting a mighty field covered with haystacks of ice now cut by ridges which varied from three to twenty feet high, necessitating, in the latter cases long detours to pass them, that six days

were required by the little band to traverse the less than thirty miles to the Esquimau village.

But before the hardship of trudging over the snow covered ice, nothing went wrong and on the morning of the seventh day, with the aid of Sykes' glasses, first Tutu and then the others of the band, save, of course, Banta, beheld the mound-like huts of the blubber eaters.

Yet it was a good six hours after they had seen them before they reached them and when they were still some quarter of a mile away, a score or so of the inhabitants started toward them.

Quickly Tutu announced this action to the Sightless Wanderer.

"Are they armed?" he asked.

"Yes, I can see some spears."

"Any bows and arrows?" Banta continued, anxiously.

"Not that I can see. Wait, they've stopped, drawn up in sort of a battle line. No, I can't see any bow and arrows—but they have dropped the points of their spears until they are about waist high."

At this statement, the two men exchanged words which the trapper did not interpret for his companions, finally declaring that Banta would proceed to talk with the Esquimaux and assure them the visit was friendly while they waited where they were.

"There's something gone wrong that you won't tell us about," declared Helen, as Tutu ceased speaking.

Bending over one of the dogs, the guide pretended not to have heard her question, saying:

"Banta wants us to be busy about something and not to watch what passes between him and the men lined up in front of us."

"He may want us to, but I won't," declared Sykes.

"Well, pretend to, at least. Sit down, or lie down, on the sled, you can fix yourself so as to see what is transpiring, but don't seem to be looking toward them."

Willing to accede this much to the guides, Ned made himself a place among the furs whence he could command very action of both the aged blind man and the Esquimau and beside him he seated Helen and Mara.

"Even Tutu's watching," laughed the beautiful girl, as she chanced to glance at the trapper.

But any comment was forgotten in the interest of what was happening at the edge of the village.

As Banta reached the line of fur-clad people, the points of the spears were dropped to the ground and queer grunts were emitted, at the same time.

"Must be some form of welcome," exclaimed Ned. Then quickly added, "and it seems to be all right. Banta's talking to them now. Hello, he's coming back with four of them while the others are returning to their huts."

And his surmise was correct.

As soon as the Esquimaux had recognized the venerable blind man, their show of hostility vanished, though they demanded of him who the people were with whom he was travelling.

But the aged wanderer was wiley. Instead of announcing the purpose of the party, he told them that they had come to purchase some pelts and walrus teeth, whereupon the headman had bidden him fetch

his companions, then declaring his intention of going out to greet them.

With all these facts, Banta acquainted Tutu as soon as he had rejoined the little band of avengers, adding:

"When you get to the hut of the headman, do you and your man companion give a small package of tobacco to all the men in the hovel. Tell the women to give candy, if they have any, to the females. I will go in and act as interpreter, but do not stay long. We must build our own hut. It will ensure our being able to care for our possessions better."

The thought that they were in danger of being robbed by the very people upon whom he had depended to befriend them and lend every assistance in continuing their journey to the island of the White Runners filled Tutu with alarm—and he wisely refrained from translating that part of Banta's statement to his companions.

Eagerly the Esquimaux examined the sled, the dogs, and the rifle of Tutu but when they beheld the beautiful girl, they forgot all else and, pointing to her, began to jabber among themselves like magpies.

But as he heard their words, an expression of deepest alarm settled upon the face of the blind man!

"Is one of the women in your party very handsome?" he hurriedly asked.

"Yes."

"Then do not let her out of your sight for an instant! I should have thought to ask you before. The men are saying that never before have they beheld such a creature and they are arguing as to which shall have the honour of entertaining her in their huts!"

At the words, the trapper clutched his rifle firmly, vowing to himself that he would put a bullet into the first man who dared so much as to lay a hand upon the exquisite girl.

Fast and furious grew the argument among the Esquimaux and two of them raised their spears as though they would engage in combat over Helen.

But there was evidently a Solomon among them—for at a few words from the oldest, the others stopped their quarrelling and he turned himself to Banta.

"He says that, being unable to settle among themselves as to whom the honor of entertaining the young woman shall go, they have left it for her to choose among them," he translated to Tutu, who in turn repeated the words to his companions.

"Pretend to be looking them over as though you were trying to decide," added the trapper, "then shrug your shoulders. I'll make answer for you. I'll say that you find them all so agreeable that you cannot decide and, that you may not injure any of their feelings, you have decided that we shall build a hut for ourselves. That ought to please them—and relieve you from an embarrassing predicament."

"By Jove! Tutu, you surely have got a clever thinking piece!" exclaimed Ned, in admiration of the manner in which the guide proposed to solve the difficulty.

But if he heard the compliment from the man whom he had cast from him as a friend, the trapper did not show it and began to state his plans to the Sightless Wanderer.

And as the latter translated the decision into the language of the Esquimaux, all the members of the little

band scanned their faces intently that they might form some idea of the manner in which it was received.

CHAPTER XII.

A NEW DANGER THREATENS HELEN.

For a moment, the faces of the Esquimaux were absolutely expressionless, as Banta finished speaking, then they suddenly broke into smiles and the men pointed to Helen, laughing loudly.

"Thank heaven, that's settled so easily!" exclaimed Ned.

But his rejoicing was premature, as he was destined to learn ere twenty-four hours had passed.

In ignorance of what was in store for them, however, the members of the little band congratulated the trapper on his resourcefulness and, at signs from the Esquimaux, they resumed their advance toward the village which was already swarming with fur-clad figures.

"How would it be for me to drop my hair over my face?" asked the exquisite girl, in evident dread of the undisguised curiosity her beauty aroused among the people awaiting her arrival.

"Too late now—it would probably start a riot which might end disastrously for us!" returned the trapper. "But as soon as we stop, you can conceal yourself among the furs while we are erecting our hut."

And glad, indeed, was Helen to avail herself of this method of avoiding the stares that were levelled at her—for while the men simply stood at a distance of a few feet and admired her, the women crowded close, some of those nearest trying to touch her dainty skin with their pudgy hands.

But as she sank down among the furs, there were howls of protest from the Esquimaux!

"Banta, tell them that the girl is a wonderful goddess of the white men in the States and that she can only show herself for fifteen minutes at a time, resting six hours between times," hurriedly commanded Tutu.

Willingly the Sightless Wanderer obeyed. At first his words were greeted with angry protests which made the four men and women clutch their revolvers tightly, then some of the male Esquimaux began to produce all sorts of curios wrought from walrus teeth, fish and bear bones, offering them with excited words to the blind man, while others scurried away to their huts, returning with magnificent skins, knives, spears, shields and many other pieces of property.

"They're bidding for a chance to see the goddess when next she shows herself!" announced Banta and as his words were repeated to the others, they could not restrain their laughter at the thought.

But the scheme of the trapper had succeeded—and for the time being Helen was safe from the stares and importunities of the Esquimaux.

Bad blood was beginning to rise between those who were bidding and as their voices grew louder and louder Tutu again suggested a plan that calmed them.

"Tell the fools that the goddess is so rich she does not need their offerings but that none may be deprived of the pleasure of seeing her, because of their poverty, she will show herself to all six hours from now, standing in front of her hut."

"Tell them also, that if they wish to win the good will of the goddess, they will hasten to erect a spacious hut for her, big enough to hold the sled as well as the five of us."

With shouts of joy, the simple minded people received the announcement that they would be permitted to gaze upon the fair skinned beauty without parting with any of their possessions and, having been put in rare good humor by the words, when Banta told of the request that a hut be built, the men fell to work with a celerity that was laughable.

Grasping the sled and dragging it to a level spot at the head of what seemed to be the widest street in the village, they pulled out their knives and cut a circle large enough to surround it with room to spare. This done, lines were drawn from circumference to circumference and then the blocks of snow were lifted out, just as though they were bricks, and laid, layer after layer, one on two of the other, with each layer overlapping toward the interior of the hut until they finally met when a big block of snow was placed on top.

In a surprisingly short time the task was finished, but when Ned and Mara tried to enter, they found the aperture which had been left for a door was so small that they had to get down on their hands and knees and wriggle with might and main to force their way inside!

Apprised by the Esquimaux that the hut had been completed, Banta called for Tutu, who had sat on the sled to guard Helen while their hovel was being built.

"Now is the time for the men to make their presents of tobacco to headman," he announced. "I, myself, will take them to him, he was asleep when we arrived and I gave commands that no one should arouse him, and will then bring him to the hut where you can talk with him and make your bargains for whatever articles you think you will need."

"All right, go ahead. Will Helen have to show herself when he comes to call on us?" asked the trapper, emerging from the hut and giving the generous portions of tobacco to the blind man.

"On no condition—I have told them that she is a goddess greater than any of theirs and so she must not let herself be seen until the six hours are up, not even by the headman!"

And as Tutu went inside the snow house, the blind man shuffled off on his mission, in due course returning with a waddling Esquimaux, so stout that it was necessary to enlarge the entrance before he could crawl within.

Lively, indeed, was the interest he evinced in the beautiful creature who had come among his people and he commanded Banta to be permitted to gaze upon her. But the guide emphatically refused raising his rifle in pantomime that he would use it upon any one who sought to look at Helen by force—and the man quickly subsided, his good humor being restored by a bag of gumdrops which Ned gave him.

Indeed, so delighted was he with them, that not until he had devoured the last one was it possible for Tutu to drive any bargains with him.

"Ask him if he'll sell us a boat and some dogs to

drag it to the frozen island," instructed the trapper of the blind man.

As the question was put to him, the headman grunted and then spoke.

"He wants to know what you will pay him for a boat and for twenty dogs, which he says will be needed," interrupted Banta.

"What does he want?"

"Gumdrops!" returned the wanderer, while the Esquimaux pointed to the empty bag Ned had given him and shook it.

"How many?"

"Bag full twice."

"Full once for dogs, half full for boat," bargained Tutu.

For several minutes, the argument waxed back and forth, but the trapper stood firm—and finally the headman gave in. This arranged, Tutu then purchased suits of polar bearskin, lined with seal, for he had determined to make his party and sleds as inconspicuous as possible in the hope they might escape detection of any prowling bands, especially the White Runners themselves, paying for them, also, in gumdrops.

But he had not been able to buy these from the headman and as the gumdrops were passed among the other members of the village and eaten, the longing for them became intense. Men and women, boys and girls thronged to the hut with everything unusual that they possessed in the effort to exchange them for the toothsome candies.

Amazed at the favor they met with the Esquimaux, Ned was, however, obliged to husband his resources—for he had only brought a couple of bushels of them—and he believed they might come in in better stead at some later time than when among the villagers who were so friendly.

But his refusal to part with any more was to cost the intrepid little band of avengers dear!

With talking and bargaining, the six hours set for the rest which the goddess must enjoy before showing herself passed though none of the little band would have thought of the fact had there not suddenly sounded a loud babel outside the hut.

Springing to their rifles, Tutu, Ned and Mara gazed apprehensively at the opening in the snow wall but their fears of trouble were quickly allayed by Banta, who after speaking with the headman, announced that the time limit would expire in ten minutes.

"Then tell him he must leave the hut while the goddess prepares herself," returned the trapper.

This decree brought a loud protest from the Esquimaux but he was at length persuaded to go outside when the blind man announced that Tutu, Ned himself must also go, leaving Helen alone with Mara.

"Put on your new polar bear furs," suggested Sykes. "The contrast with your red cheeks and black hair will give the lubbers something to think and talk about for many a day, I venture."

And when the beautiful girl emerged from the snow house and stood erect, the young fellow's words were confirmed.

From the hundred odd inhabitants of the village, there arose a mighty shout of praise and astonishment, many of them dropping on their knees, and lifting their hands to her, as though she were, indeed, a goddess.

But in the general joy, the headman touched a note of danger that sent the shivers down Tutu's spine!

"She must stay here—if she should journey West the White Runners would get her!" declared the ruler of the village.

CHAPTER XIII.

THE HEADMAN'S PLOT.

"Ask him what makes him think they will?" exclaimed Tutu, as soon as the words of the headman had been repeated to him.

Quickly was the question put and as quickly came the answer:

"He says that seven of the White Runners passed through the village three days ago."

"Did they have any prisoners—or whatever you call them—in their party?"

Again was there an interchange of words in a low voice between the leader of the village and the Sightless Wanderer.

"He says there were five, three men and two women!"

At this news, the guide could not restrain his emotions and jumping up and down, he called to his companions:

"Wanok is safe! Wanok is safe!"

"How do you know?" demanded Ned.

"The headman says that seven of the devilish White Runners passed through the village three days ago and that they had five people with them, three men and two women—which means that they have carried Wanok with them, instead of killing him as I feared they had done."

The gladsome tidings brought an expression of such great beauty to the face of Helen, that even her companions marvelled.

"Quick, let us start right away on the trail—we may be in time to rescue Jack and the others," she cried. "Tutu, have Banta tell the men who are going with us to drive the dogs to make the sleds ready at once, to load the boat on one of them and that we will start immediately!"

Turning swiftly to carry out these instructions, the trapper surprised a look of infinite cunning on the face of the headman.

"Aha, you want to keep Helen here not because you fear the White Runners but that you may have her!" he murmured to himself. And, though he had determined to urge delay in setting out, in view of this discovery, he even added to the words of the beautiful girl, demanding that the sleds be made ready at once.

But when Banta communicated his demands, they were met with loud and emphatic protests from all the Esquimaux.

"A feast has been prepared for the goddess, she must remain and partake of it!" replied the leader. "If the rest of you wish to go, you may. But the goddess must grace our feast!"

"Tell them that she will not stay here!" snapped

Tutu. "Bribe the drivers to make ready at once by the promise of gumdrops at every meal until we get to the frozen island!"

"Helen, go into the house! Mara, you and Sykes take up your seats, rifles in your hands, one at either side of the entrance. Don't let a soul come in. I'm going to the headman's hut with Banta!"

Wondering at the sudden change in their guide, the New Yorkers would have pressed him for an explanation had he given them the opportunity but, divining their intentions, he moved away from them and they were compelled to crawl inside the snow house in ignorance of Tutu's plans.

But not far did he go from the hut!

Seizing Banta by the arm, he drew him to one side. "Tell the headman that the goddess will bring down a terrible curse upon the village if he seeks to detain her, then get the drivers and bring them to me."

And as the Sightless Wanderer departed on his mission, for the leader of the Esquimaux had hastened away as soon as the beautiful girl had entered the snow house, the guide returned to his companions.

"We've got to get away from here, even if we have to walk and leave our sleds behind!" Tutu declared as he stood within the hut.

"What's happened? I thought everything was going along splendidly," exclaimed Helen.

"So did I—but there's something in the wind of which we are in ignorance. And I don't propose to take any chances.

"Quick, fall to and stow what food you can in your furs and some in your sleeping bags!"

Instantly the other members of the brave little band set to work and they were still engaged in making their selection of furs and food when the blind man returned.

"The headman says he does not believe that the beautiful woman is a goddess, that he does not fear her curse and that he will not permit her to go until she has partaken of the feast that has been prepared for her.

"In order to carry out his command and to ensure her presence, he has ordered fifty of his spearmen to surround the hut!"

With blanched faces, the avengers heard these tidings.

"What a fool I was not to have thought to drop my hair over my face when we arrived at the village!" lamented the fair girl.

"Well, it's too late to be sorry now—the thing for us to do is get you away from here and at the same time to scare the Esquimaux into the belief that you have the power to bring a curse down upon their heads!" asserted the trapper.

"True enough—but how can we do it?" demanded Sykes.

"The first thing to do is to try to scare them. Break out a couple of the Roman candles we brought along for signals in case we got separated in a fog!"

Instantly Ned went to one of the boxes on the sled and produced the pieces of fireworks.

Grasping them, Tutu once again grabbed the blind man by the arm.

"We must try to frighten the spearmen away. You tell them that the goddess has sent a curse upon them

and that at her command, balls of fire will jump about!"

And without giving Banta time to ask any questions, the trapper drew him through the opening in the stone house.

At the sight of the member of the little party, the Esquimaux lowered their spears as though they would charge him and Tutu noticed that the points were different from those on the weapons they had displayed upon their arrival, being formed of long and sharp pieces of bone.

Ere the men could make any hostile move, however, the Sightless Wanderer had repeated the words told him. But their only effect was to evoke howls of derision from the Esquimaux!

Realizing that the threat had failed to have the hoped for result, the trapper cleverly managed to light one of the candles behind his back and as he heard it sputter, suddenly whirled it in front of him, discharging one of the balls almost in the face of a spearman close beside him!

Never had the simple people of the Arctic regions seen one of the Roman candles and as it shot forth the ball which had come so near to hitting one of the number, they leaped backwards, in terror.

Quick to press his advantage, Tutu pointed his finger at another spearman, uttered a shrill "You" and pop! went another ball at the second Esquimaux!

Singling out others of the spearmen in different directions, the trapper discharged the candle at them until, as the last ball leaped from the little paper tube, the men were in full flight!

Chuckling to himself at their terror, Tutu took his interpreter back into the hut.

But while he and his companions were laughing at the success of the attempt to frighten the inhabitants, one of the sled drivers crawled through the entrance.

"Ask him what he wants!" commanded the trapper of Banta, telling him who the man was.

"He says he has something to tell you in exchange for some gumdrops!"

"Talk with him a moment and see if you think he really has—or is just trying to procure some of the candy."

In strained silence, the others awaited the outcome of the conversation between the two men.

"He says it is important—very!"

"Tell him to be quick—that I'll give him thirty gumdrops!"

No sooner was the bargain made than the Esquimaux poured out a stream of words.

"He says the headman has decided to take Helen for his wife and that he is planning to surround the hut, batter it to pieces, kill the rest of us, if necessary, that he may obtain his desire."

At the horrible thought of the beautiful girl falling into the clutches of the fat monster, the faces of the little band blanched.

But while they gazed at one another in helpless dismay, Mara spoke.

"Send the driver out and then listen to me," she exclaimed. And when the man had been given his gumdrops and told to stay outside and give the alarm should any of the headman's villains approach, she continued:

"There is just one way to save Helen—for her to ex-

change clothes and everything with me. We can send word to the headman that she has agreed to wait for the feast but that the rest of us must go on at once.

"The leader will see the opportunity to carry out his foul scheme and not think to follow. Quick, Helen, make the change!"

"But I can't leave you here to that monster!" gasped the beautiful girl.

"Oh, yes you can—and you must! I shall be able to take care of myself among these people—but don't stop to argue! You're losing time that may make even my plan impossible!"

"That's the only way we can save you!" declared Tutu. "Mara, you are a brave girl. I'll not desert you! As soon as I have started Helen and the sleds safely on their way, I'll return—and if I can't shoot every sneaking lubber in this village before they can stab me, I'll miss my guess!"

"Hurry, Helen!"

Ere the fair creature could make any move to exchange her furs with Mara, however, there came a voice from outside, which spoke earnestly and excitedly.

"The messenger says that the headman has heard of the powers to shoot fire at his men and is willing that she should resume her trip to the East just as soon as the feast has been eaten! The others he gives the choice of either going or staying," interpreted Banta.

"Tell him the goddess accepts his invitation and will go to his hut within an hour, while her companions will start immediately!" commanded Tutu.

Even while the Sightless Wanderer was repeating the words, Mara was working the transformation in Helen and in a surprisingly short time, with the aid of a little blubber, had changed the face of the beautiful girl into one of dark hue.

"That color, with my furs, will fool them!" announced the brave girl, standing back and viewing her handiwork.

"But I can't let you make this sacrifice for me, Mara!" protested Helen.

"You not only can—but you will!"

"I loved your brother, Wanok! He has been taken from me—do you think life holds any more charm for me? Can you imagine anything more sweet than, deprived of my loved, to give my life to save that of his sister?"

CHAPTER XIV.

UNEXPECTED ASSISTANCE COMES TO MARA.

At the words, revealing as they did a glimpse into her very soul, the others looked at Mara in admiration and sorrow.

Of a sudden, the beautiful Helen rushed toward her, seized her in her arms and kissed her!

But ere a word could be spoken, there sounded another hail from without the snow house.

"The headman is rejoiced that the goddess is to share his feast and is willing to guard her until the return of her companions, if she wishes. The sleds are awaiting

the coming of the others. As soon as they are ready, men will come to carry the furs and baggage from the hut to the sleds for the headman has prepared a sled in exchange for the one in the snow house," repeated Banta.

"Good, tell the leader to send his men at once." And as the messenger departed, Tutu turned to Sykes: "You will remain here in the hut until all the goods have been removed, then follow. I would stay only if it is more necessary that I go to the sleds to protect Helen—and we must not permit her to remain in the hut an instant longer than necessary."

While the trapper was speaking, the two women locked in a soul-trying embrace, kissed and separated, the beautiful girl leaving the snow house under the protection of Tutu while the woman who had made so noble a sacrifice that the sister of her lover might be spared a terrible fate sat, her shoulders bent, staring through the hair which she had let down over her face at the entrance to the hut.

Fate, however, did not demand so great a sacrifice of the noble woman!

As Sykes and Mara, the latter garbed in the furs which the supposed goddess had worn when she exhibited herself to the amazed eyes of the Esquimaux, sat staring with dull eyes at the opening through which the other members of that little band had passed, they were suddenly roused from their lethargy by the sounds of angry voices outside.

Turning her head that she might hear the better, the girl listened, an instant, then exclaimed:

"The men are coming to carry out our belongings—but there is trouble among them!"

"How do you know?"

"I understand enough of their language to be able to tell what they are talking about."

"And you've understood all that Banta has said to the headman and the others?" gasped Ned, in surprise.

"Yes."

"Why didn't you tell us you could talk with the brutes—it would have saved using and trusting the blind man so much."

"In the first place, I didn't want the villagers to know that you had any one with you who could converse in their tongue—and in the second, I wished to learn whether or not Banta was dealing fairly with us."

"Was he? Has he taken advantage of us in any way?"

"Not for an instant. He has even pleaded, using his own personality as a reason for treating us with consideration, when the men were determined to kill you and Tutu."

"Why didn't you tell us of the fact?"

"Never mind, now. Just go to the box in which you keep the Roman candles and get out a dozen for me!"

"What do you propose to do?"

"Don't waste time by asking questions—do as I say. The lives of both of us may depend upon our having the fireworks!"

Thus adjured, the New Yorker lost no time in getting out the candles which had caused such terror among the spearmen and he handed them to Mara just as the first of the Esquimaux crawled through the opening.

Getting to his feet, he looked about as though expecting to see the Sightless Wanderer.

With her hands, the woman indicated that all the others had taken their departure and then made the fellow understand by signs that he was to lose no time in removing the trappings and boxes from the sled.

As the man slouched to the pile of provisions and furs, he began to search among them and as he was thus occupied, another and another Esquimau entered the hut, quickly engaging in speech with the first man.

For several moments, Mara listened, then turned to Ned and, in a voice so low that it was not heard above the arguing tones of the natives asked:

"Can they get at the gumdrops?"

"No. They're in sealed cans which are fastened by padlocks. Why?"

"Because they are discussing the advisability of seizing the candy and making off, leaving us to shift for ourselves, or rather you, for they say the headman will be here for me in a short while."

Determined that the brutes should not succeed in their purpose, Sykes sprang to his feet, approached the nearest Esquimau, whipped out his revolvers and poking them into the man's back, by means of signs and grunts signified to him that he must hurry and remove the trappings if he wished to live.

Terrified by the sight of the strange weapons, the villagers quickly grabbed what they could among the furs and boxes and scurried to the opening, through which they pushed them.

"You'd better go outside and accompany the devils, they're likely to discover the cans containing the gumdrops at any time—and once they do there will be no doing anything with them!" exclaimed Mara.

"But what will become of you? I can't leave you here alone, among all these devils!" protested Ned.

"Never mind about me—protect the candy. It will prove our most valuable aid. But when you reach Tutu and the others, ask him to come back for me.

"I have a plan which may succeed. He can help in bringing that about—if he comes to me in time. Now go. Urge the villagers to haste by poking them with your revolvers. *But on no account shoot them off!*"

"The emergency is not yet sufficiently great—and it is upon the terror the shots will cause that I have based my plans!"

Half understanding what the brave woman had in her mind, Sykes seized her hand, gave it an impulsive squeeze and dropped to his knees to crawl from the snow house, saying:

"Have good courage, Mara. Tutu and I will be back within a short time."

"No, you mustn't come!" cried the girl. "You are needed to watch over Helen. I want just Tutu alone!"

"All right. Good luck—and I hope to see you safe and sound in an hour or so!" called Ned, as he gained the outside.

But little did he think of the courage it would require on the part of the girl to make her rejoining the band of intrepid and sorely pressed avengers possible!

As the gumdrops had been carried out by the first gang of villagers, Sykes walked beside them while several of the natives went inside the snow house and quickly emerged with more furs and boxes.

And all the while the trappings were being brought out and carried to the waiting sleds, the headman, from a point of vantage behind a big piece of ice was watching operations!

No sooner had he seen the last of the carriers depart from the hut than he waddled from his lookout and started toward the snow hut.

But before he had gained the entrance, three men threw themselves across his path.

"What do you mean by stopping my progress?" he cried to them, angrily, in their language.

"Stepan says that you are not to enter the hut of the goddess—that he intends to take her for his own bride!" announced one of those who disputed the leader's passage.

A moment the headman stood, inactive, his face expressing the fury that was in his heart.

"Tell the dog of a man that I will have his life's blood for his boldness in attempting to thwart the purpose of his headman!" he finally thundered. "Stand aside and let me pass!"

But the three villagers made no move to obey!

"Stepan laughs at your threats!" exclaimed another. "Too long have we of the village been your slaves—and we are ready for a new ruler!"

As he heard the treasonable words, the leader of the villagers placed a bone whistle to his lips and blew loudly on it five times, the signal to his subjects that he was in dire danger and that they must rally to his support.

And as he finished the summons, he snarled:

"Stepan is not here—you dogs are trying to frighten me!"

"True, Stepan is not here—but he will be within fifteen minutes!" declared the first speaker.

"But he has gone on a hunting trip!" declared the headman.

"True again—and word of your treatment of the beautiful goddess and her companions has been carried to him. And when he heard of it, he dashed his spear against a cake of ice, saying that thus would he dash another against you! He is returning with all speed!"

So loud and angry were the voices of the disputants that their words clearly reached the ears of Mara and, determined to take advantage of the scare the leader of the villagers had received, she crawled from the hut, crept up upon the headman, then shot the contents of a candle into his face!

CHAPTER XV.

TUTU RESCUES MARA.

Only having heard from his terrified spearmen of the wonderful and mysterious balls of fire which one of the goddess' men had discharged at them, the leader of the villagers had laughed at his warriors.

But when he had received the full force of the candle in his face, he turned and ran as fast as his short legs could carry him, shouting in wild fright as he went!

In amazement, the man who had sought to defend the helpless woman from the headman that she might become the bride of the absent Stepan, stood and stared at her as she shot ball after ball at the leader—

then, at his flight, they burst into loud peals of laughter.

Fearing, however, that she had but changed one danger from another, Mara hurriedly lighted another candle from the embers of the stalk she held in her hand and, ere the astonished Esquimaux could gather their wits, she was sending the little, popping balls of fire into their faces!

And as the headman, so they broke into flight, shrieking and howling as they rushed along.

The cries had roused the other inhabitants of the village and as fast as they could, they were swarming from their huts—having sought refuge inside them at the behest of their leader when he had decided to carry off the goddess to become one of his wives.

As they came out into the open, they ran into one another, all asking questions, shoving and jostling—and as no one seemed able to say what had happened, the wildest confusion ensued.

"Now's my time!" murmured the brave Mara, to herself. And while the attention of the villagers was momentarily distracted from her, she broke into as fast a run as her furs would permit and hastened off in the direction she had learned the sleds to be.

Some two hundred yards had she covered and the feeling that she had outwitted her would-be captors was growing stronger and stronger within her breast when her hopes were suddenly dashed by hearing from behind shouts of:

"There she goes! There she goes! To the West! To the West!"

And the yells of triumph with which the words were greeted told her that the Esquimaux considered her as good as overtaken.

But the girl had not gained her liberty by such desperate and courageous methods to give up without further effort and, summoning all her strength, she dashed ahead with what speed she could.

The ice, however, was hummocky and her advance was slow—so slow that, being on better going, her pursuers traversed two yards while she advanced one.

Quick were the villagers to realize this fact, and, redoubling their shouts, they soon added to her danger by shooting arrows at her.

Fortunately for Mara, however, the men were too excited to be able to aim true and the terrible weapons bearing points of triangular walrus teeth, so sharp that they would cut like steel knives, fell harmlessly upon the ice about her.

But there was the chance that at any moment one of the death-dealing shafts might accidentally strike her—and this danger became greater with each moment, as the men gained upon her.

Yet just when the possibility of the success of her venture seemed the dimmest, aid was coming to her!

The instant Ned had arrived within hailing distance of the sleds where Tutu and the others were awaiting him, he had shouted the commands of the girl to the trapper and, with a word of courage to Helen, the brave guide and started back toward the village on the run.

The roughness of the ice impeded his progress, however, just as it had Mara's and it seemed to him that it required hours for him to advance a foot.

But at last he caught sight of the girl stumbling and staggering ahead while showers of arrows fell about her.

The distance which separated him from her pursuers was a good two hundred yards—but the guide determined to risk a shot, trusting that it would at least strike terror to the hearts of the villagers.

First, however, he raised his voice in a mighty shout to let the brave Mara know that aid was near.

But the Esquimaux heard it as well as the girl—and their answers were fierce howls of angry defiance!

Little did Tutu reek for them, however, and throwing his rifle to his shoulder, he trained it upon the top of a hummock only a few feet in front of the leader of the pursuers.

Crash! went the gun—and almost at the same time, hundreds of pieces of ice bounded into the air!

At the sight, the pursuers stopped, terrified!

Never before had they beheld a gun which could carry such a distance—and the thought that they were at the mercy of a man who could strike them when five times as far as their arrows would carry took all the heart out of them.

"The white men were right! The white men were right! The woman is a goddess—she is sending her charms against us!" howled some of the villagers.

As she heard the words, the light of hope leaped into Mara's eyes!

"Fire again, Tutu! Bring down a man, if you can!" she shouted, at the same time taking care not to betray the fact that she understood the language of the Esquimaux.

Elated with the success of the first shot and realizing that he had scared the villagers half out of their wits—if not entirely—the trapper had taken advantage of their panic-caused halt to rush still nearer to them.

Consequently, when he heard Mara's plea, he was well within range.

"Which one shall I bring down?" he called back. "We've got them going! Just seem to point out several and finally decide on one. Have him in the front rank—and I'll drop him!"

Realizing the purpose of adding to the fright of the Esquimaux by seeming to select a man from their numbers upon whom to inflict punishment for daring to give chase to the supposed goddess, Mara raised her finger, pointing at four men, then finally picking out the one nearest and waving her hand at him three times.

As both she and Tutu intended, the action had been seen by the villagers and, wondering what was next in store for them, they gazed at the man and woman as though frozen to the ice.

But not long were they in ignorance of what the meaning of the pointing was!

Again throwing his rifle to his shoulder, Tutu took aim at the right leg of the Esquimaux and fired.

With a howl of ear-splitting terror, the native leaped into the air, then fell flat on the ice—while his companions turned tail and dashed for the village at top speed, leaving their fellow to whatever fate might be in store for him!

CHAPTER XVI.

THE RIVAL CLANS OF ESQUIMAUX GO TO BATTLE.

Overjoyed at his success in putting the band of Esquimaux to rout, the trapper hurried toward Mara.

"Aren't you going to shoot at them again?" she called, noting that the guide made no motion as though so to do.

"What's the use? We've got them on the run! Powder and cartridge are too precious to waste on the devils."

Mara, however, understood the nature of the dwellers of the North better than did the trapper and hastily replied:

"If you take my advice, you will keep dropping bullets among them as long as they are in range—it will add to their terror and it doesn't make any difference whether you hit one of them or not. The scattering of sprays of ice will scare them just as much, now they have seen that one of the bullets can lay a man low."

Realizing that the girl spoke the truth, Tutu raised his rifle and sent a bullet screaming through the air, landing in the midst of a group of five of the villagers and showering them with ice. And the renewed howls of fear which broke from their lips told him that the act was a wise one—and accordingly, he dropped shells into various portions of the fleeing Esquimaux as long as he could make his bullets reach them.

All the while, however, he and the girl were hastening with what speed they could toward their companions at the sleds.

As the latter heard the shots, they were seized with alarm for the safety of the guide and the brave girl.

"Go back to them—oh, do go back to them, please, Ned!" pleaded Helen.

Mindful of the instructions of the trapper to stay by the beautiful girl, no matter what occurred, the young man sturdily refused.

"But think what would become of us if any harm should befall Tutu!" she protested.

"I realize that as well as you, Helen," returned Ned. "But think of what might happen were I to leave you alone with these two drivers and the gum-drops!"

The combination of herself and the candy struck the overwrought nerves of the beauty as exceedingly funny and she broke into an hysterical laugh.

"I fancy the candy is in more danger than I am—besides, I have my revolvers and I ought to be able to take care of myself with them."

"Nevertheless, I'm not going to leave you—so there's an end to it! Besides, Tutu is amply able to take care of himself. And as I gave Mara a dozen roman candles, it is my opinion that both of them will soon rejoin us!"

The words, uttered with a greater conviction than he felt, succeeded in assuaging Helen's fears for the safety of the trapper and the noble girl who had so willingly sacrificed herself that the sister of the man she loved might have the chance to escape from the clutches of the headman of the Esquimaux village and of a sudden, she exclaimed:

"Can't we go back and see what is going on?"

A moment Sykes pondered over this request.

"I don't see why not," he finally declared. "The drivers won't leave, that's certain and from the loudness of the reports, I don't think Tutu can be very far away."

Accordingly, the man and girl set out to return to their friends and arrived on a ridge whence they could obtain a clear view of the stretch of ice lying between it and the village in time to see the warriors in full

flight and the trapper occasionally dropping bullets among them.

And as they beheld the rout, Helen and Ned cheered lustily.

Alarmed at hearing voices from this new direction, Tutu and Mara quickly turned to learn from whom they came—but at the sight of their friends, they too shouted with joy.

But though they had succeeded in driving back the spear and bow men of the headman, the members of the intrepid little band of avengers had not escaped all danger at the hands of the villagers.

As the trapper and Mara rejoined their companions and then approached the sleds, Stepan, the man who had sent his defiance to the leader of the villagers, reached the scene.

Marvelling at the sight of the warriors returning post-haste to the village, he inquired the cause—and when he learned it, he upbraided them mercilessly for their timidity!

"My people, you have before you evidence that neither the headman nor his supporters are longer fit to lead you. They have fled from a man and a woman!

"Because of this cowardice, I, Stepan, proclaim myself leader of you and headman of the village!"

This announcement was greeted with mingled cheers and shouts of derision by those who heard it. And in the midst of the pandemonium, the headman whose rule was threatened, appeared upon the scene.

"We'll fight for the leadership!" he bellowed, when the cause of the uproar had been explained to him. "Stepan, do you line up your men to the West of the village and I will line up mine with the backs to the huts—as befits the warriors of a leader when the safety of his village and his people are endangered by an enemy—and because you have proclaimed yourself as successor to my office, you are an enemy of all loving people!"

This announcement, being in strict accord with procedure among the Esquimaux when the rule of a living leader is challenged, the villagers offered no comment. And hurriedly the men who sided with the newcomer and those who upheld the rule of the headman separated, making their way to the designated scene of conflict as quickly as they could.

As they went, the men chanted wild songs of defiance and blood, while every now and then the shrill voices of the women, encouraging one side or the other rose above the tumult—for the fighting blood of the men was aroused by the disgrace to which they had been put by the little band of avengers and they were eager to wreak their anger in some way. Furthermore, as the fight was to be waged with spears, arrows and terrible knives made from polished and sharpened bones, weapons with which they were all familiar, they welcomed the fray!

Stationing themselves in front of their respective armies, the headman and Stepan glowered at one another.

"Are you ready?" at last asked the challenger.

"Yes!"

Instantly, the two leaders raised their voices in mighty shouts—and the armies fell upon one another. First, the bow and arrow men shot their wicked shafts at one another, then, as the contestants came to closer quarters, these men dropped to the rear and the spear men took their places.

CHAPTER XVII.

STEPAN GOES IN PURSUIT OF A BRIDE.

Terrible were the wounds inflicted by the wicked weapons of the fighters and above the hoarse cries of battle, sounded the shrieks and curses of the wounded and they fell gravely injured or dying.

Numerically superior, the forces of the headman at first drove back those of Stepan. But each inch of the retreat was stubbornly fought until the men reached a ridge too high for them to climb, necessitating their making a stand, willy-nilly.

Noting this fact, the challenger shouted to his men, alternately cursing and encouraging them until he had roused them to a pitch of veritable frenzy.

Believing that the victory was already theirs, the men of the leader of the village rushed upon the waiting enemy.

But they were soon apprised of their mistake!

Stepan had formed his plan of battle by ordering his bow and arrow men to drop on their knees behind the spearmen, whom he ranged in the front rank. With arrows fitted to their bows, the hidden men were to await the command of their leader—and when it came, the spearmen were to leap aside while the others discharged the volley of their death-dealing arrows.

With a coolness that was remarkable, Stepan stood in front of his men, arrows and spears from the advancing warriors falling about him harmlessly, as though he bore a charmed life.

Nearer and nearer came the enemy.

When at last they were within two rods of his men, the brave challenger shouted his order.

Swiftly the spearmen sprang to one side and before the band of the headman could realize what was going on, the bow and arrow men were pouring a deadly fire into them!

An instant, the others stood their ground, then turned and fled, despite the frantic yells of their leader to stand their ground.

"We've won! We've won!" shouted Stepan. "Charge them, men, drive them back to the village. Give them no quarter until the headman surrenders."

"There are enough of us to populate the village—and then there won't be any cowards who run from one man and a woman among our people!"

With howls of wildest glee were these words received—and, flushing with their sense of victory, Stepan's warriors leaped from the ridge against which they had taken a half-hearted stand and pursued their defeated foes across the ice to the village.

Because of his bulk, the headman was not able to run as fast as his men and he soon fell captive to Stepan.

"Will you surrender your title to me and save the slaughter of your subjects?" demanded the victor.

"Never!" screamed the vanquished leader, purple with rage and disappointment. "You have beaten me, won my title and wealth—but you shall never rule me!"

And as he concluded these proud words, the deposed headman drew a walrus dagger from his pocket and plunged it into his heart!

This act was quickly reported to the rest of the villagers, together with the fact that Stepan would divide

the dead leader's wealth upon all who would swear allegiance to him.

At the announcement, with that fickleness for which the dwellers in the Arctic regions are famous, the Esquimaux hailed Stepan with mighty cheers and struggled with one another to kiss his hand in token of submission and obedience.

But not long did the new headman tarry to enjoy the fruits of his victory.

After giving orders that a feast for every man, woman and child in the village should be prepared, he called two of his trusty men to him.

"The winning of the title is as nothing to me compared with the winning of the beautiful creature, who was here in the village to-day, as my wife!

"Quickly collect some food and join me at the ridge where we made our stand. It is my intention to pursue the band of trappers and to seize the girl who calls herself a goddess."

"But she fights with balls of fire and her companions stand afar off and hurl things you cannot see!" protested one of the men.

"Nonsense! Are we not able to stalk fools like them who do not know the country and the ice?"

"But they do know the ice—that is they are led by one who does!"

"Who is it?"

"The Sightless Wanderer!"

At the name of the man whose body was considered sacred, Stepan became gloomy—but at last he said:

"It is well—the woman must be a goddess when he guides her. We will not try to steal her. I must seek a wife elsewhere. Leave me, and allow no one to enter my hut until I give the command!"

Marvelling at the sudden change in their leader, his trusty companions withdrew—yet could they have read what was passing in his mind, they would have been still more amazed.

Knowing the respect and adoration in which the Sightless Wanderer was held by all who lived along the shore of Beaufort Sea, Stepan dared not speak his plan even to the men whom he had created his counsellors.

But he had promised himself that if the blind man was all that stood between him and the beauty, he would remove the obstacle—and for that purpose, he decided to set out at once and alone. Waiting only to make sure that his sentries had taken their positions in front of his snow palace, the new headman stole out a rear exit and was soon skulking along over the ice in pursuit of the intrepid little band of avengers.

Excited by the events of the day, after the band had advanced some five miles from the village, they made camp in a natural hollow which was protected on three sides by high walls of ice and were soon fast asleep.

With rare cunning, Stepan found his quarry.

As he entered the camp, several of the dogs roused themselves but before they could give the alarm, he spoke to them, and, inasmuch as he had often driven them, they quickly quieted down at the sound of his voice.

Having succeeded in quelling their excitement, he turned to the sleds. But before he reached them, he came upon the body of the Sightless Wanderer.

"This is luck!" told himself. "With him out of the

way, I shall have no difficulty in disposing of the others and capturing my bride!"

And even as he spoke, the fiend, who intended to defy all the traditions of the North by murdering a blind man, raised his hand in the air, holding in his clasp a walrus dagger.

But Banta's wonderful sense of danger came to his rescue and he sat up, shrieking!

CHAPTER XVIII.

AN IMPORTANT CAPTURE.

Panic-stricken to think he had been caught in the act of attempting to kill the Sightless Wanderer, Stepan leaped backward just as Tutu, aroused by the shout of alarm, emerged from beneath the pile of furs which he had chosen as his sleeping place instead of his usual bag.

And as he beheld the form of the prowler, he whipped out his revolvers and poured the contents of their cylinders at the figure.

Howling with mingled pain and rage at the frustration of his plans to carry off the beautiful girl, the Esquimau dropped to the ground!

The reports of the shots, reverberating with uncanny intensity in the ice-walled refuge had awakened the others and quickly they were on their feet.

"I've just dropped a fellow I found sneaking about!" exclaimed Tutu. Then he turned to the dog drivers and signified to them that they should examine the body to see if they recognized it.

Cautiously the men approached—and as they arrived within a yard of it, the figure leaped to its feet and made a dash for the open side of the camp!

"It's Stepan! It's Stepan!" shouted the amazed dog drivers.

The name was all that the trapper and his companions could understand—but they remembered the story Mara had told them of the words she had heard outside the snow house back in the village and they realized that he had come for the purpose of carrying off Helen.

"Quick, after him!" bellowed Tutu.

Having recovered his composure with remarkable rapidity, Banta repeated the command to the drivers but they refused to join in the chase, and though the trapper and Sykes searched the ice all about the camp, they were unable to discover the man who had come so near to murdering the blind man.

Disappointed, they returned to their fellows where they heard from the lips of the Sightless Wanderer how he had suddenly felt a sense of greatest danger and had sat up, shouting.

"That's a time when you must admit Banta's powers saved us, Sykes," exclaimed Tutu. "If it hadn't been for him, we all might be lying dead in our blood this very minute. Esquimaux work quickly when they are murdering!"

While the trapper was speaking, the dog drivers had been searching the icy floor of the refuge and, with a cry, one of them picked up the walrus dagger that

Stepan had dropped when Tutu's first shot had struck him.

With this evidence of the prowler's purpose, doubt of his intention of killing the blind man no longer lingered in the minds of any of them—and as Banta announced his opinion to the dog drivers, they shuddered, calling down curses upon the head of the man who would defy all Esquimau traditions.

"What I don't understand is why your shots didn't kill the murderous fiend!" exclaimed Ned.

"That puzzles me, too," admitted the trapper. And quickly he questioned the blind man, who in turn asked the dog drivers if they knew of any reason which would render Stepan immune from bullets.

For several minutes, the two men talked together in low voices and then one of them said:

"Stepan always wears a coat of mail. He found it in one of the wrecks near the frozen island. His heavy furs and this suit of armor must have stopped the bullets."

"I reckon that's the explanation," declared Tutu. "But let's get out of here. The fellow may come back with some of his companions!"

Readily did the others agree to the resumption of the march and as soon as the dogs could be harnessed, the party set out again.

Soon after the hour that corresponds to dawn, Banta suddenly raised his head and sniffed.

"Polar bears somewhere close by!" he exclaimed.

Taking the glasses from Sykes, Tutu hurried to a hummock of ice some three rods to the North and was just lifting his head cautiously over the top when he ducked back again, put down the glasses, clasped his rifle and again creeping to the top of the hummock, pointed the weapon over the further side of the ice mound and fired.

But the shriek that greeted the discharge of the rifle was not that of a polar bear!

"It's one of the White Runners!" shouted the trapper, leaping after his victim.

CHAPTER XIX.

SYKES IS CAUGHT IN SNOW-ROTTED ICE.

Instantly all but Banta and the dog drivers ran to the hummock as fast as they could, arriving just as Tutu was uncovering the face of the man he had shot.

And as he gazed upon it, he cried out in amazement! "So that's what became of you, Jem Scott!" he exclaimed.

"Who was Jem Scott?" asked Helen, arriving at the moment that the trapper pronounced the name.

"A robber and murderer whom we drove out of a settlement along the Mackenzie River. But I never thought he would have the nerve to join the White Runners!"

All the while he was speaking, the trapper was going through the clothes worn by the dead member of the Terror of the North—but not a thing did he find

in addition to daggers and revolvers except a piece of bone with three holes bored in it.

"Wonder if that's a badge showing his membership in the White Runners," suggested Ned.

"Can't tell, shouldn't be surprised," returned the trapper. "When we get back, we'll ask Banta and the dog drivers, they may know."

"Well, thank goodness, we've sent one of the fiends to the doom he so richly deserves!" exclaimed Helen. "I only hope we shall be able to capture the others as easily and avenge my dear father!"

"That's what we're going to try to do," declared Tutu, brusquely, adding as he saw tears gathering in the beautiful girl's eyes: "But we can't dally here. I'm going to leave the devil's carcass out here but first I'll cut him and draw blood, so that some of the polar bears he imitates in his garb may smell him and devour him!"

The thought of such an ending, however, horrified the fair girl.

"You're surely not going to leave a human being unburied, are you?" she asked.

"I most certainly am. He isn't worth the trouble of cutting a block of ice and placing him under it!"

"But you'd want some one to bury you, if your positions were changed!" protested Helen.

"Do you realize that this dead man is one of the band who have done your father to death and are even at this moment carrying your brother away to some awful fate?" demanded the trapper, ignoring the girl's words and seeking to rouse her vengeance.

The start she gave as he spoke told him he had succeeded and his thoughts were confirmed by her exclamation, as she turned away:

"Well, you know best, of course."

None of them desiring to see a dead body cut that it might attract man-eating monsters, all except Tutu started back to the sleds and were quickly joined by the trapper when he had performed his awful task.

"Did you find anything on the fiend?" asked Banta, eagerly, when the party reached the sleds.

"Yes, a round piece of bone with——"

"Any holes in it?" eagerly interrupted the Sightless Wanderer.

"Three. Do you know what they mean?"

The announcement of the number of holes evoked an exclamation of surprised joy from the blind man and afire with curiosity, the others waited while he talked excitedly to Tutu.

"He says this piece of bone with the three holes is a summons to return to the frozen island for an important gathering of the White Runners—what it means we can readily guess, in view of the fact that the fiends have just captured five people!"

"But what's more important, we may have the good luck to round-up all the murdering robbers if we can only get to their lair while they are there!"

The thought of capturing the entire band of devils who had been the Terror of all the law-abiding, peaceful men and women seeking to wrest a livelihood from the furs they obtained along the shore of the Beaufort Sea filled the little band of avengers with the keenest hope and almost light heartedly they resumed their march toward the frozen island.

Within twenty-four hours, they had the extreme good fortune to strike ice that was almost entirely

free from hummocks and ridges and they made remarkable speed for four days.

But on the morning of the fifth, their hearts sank!

"Go carefully! There's snow rotted ice near at hand!" suddenly called the Sightless Wanderer and as the others stopped in dismay, he added: "The young man who has doubted my powers must not take another step!"

Believing that he had the opportunity for which he had been wishing to prove that the seemingly remarkable warnings the blind man had uttered were as much clever guesswork as anything else, Sykes defiantly continued his advance.

But not three steps had he taken when there was a crunching sound and he sank from view!

"Help him! Save him! Tutu, Mara, boys, quick!" screamed Helen, wringing her hands in despair.

Cursing the New Yorker for a fool, the trapper and the woman sprang forward toward the hole while the dog drivers hurriedly seized thongs of walrus hide from the sleds and followed.

"Don't try to walk to him!" warned Banta.

"But how can he get to him if he doesn't?" moaned Helen.

Unable to understand what the beautiful girl said yet divining her meaning, the Sightless Wanderer hastily added:

"Drop on your hands and knees, Tutu. Have the boys bring you the oars from the boat. Take one in each hand and work yourself along!"

While these instructions were being delivered and carried out, Ned's head had appeared above the ice and frantically he struggled to find a hold by which he could drag himself from the freezing water, at the same time shouting for assistance.

Twice he succeeded in drawing himself half way onto the ice when it again gave way with him, plunging him back into the water.

"Save your strength! Just keep your head above water and we'll get you in a few minutes!" shouted the trapper.

But his task of reaching a spot close enough to the immersed man was fraught with the greatest difficulty and danger.

Several times as he placed his oar ahead and started to draw himself forward, the ice gave way beneath him and it required all his strength and agility to get back to the solid part.

At last, however, he gained a point less than ten feet from where Ned was hanging on. Quickly coiling the pieces of thong which the dog drivers had brought to him, Tutu hurled them at Sykes.

But the first time they fell short!

"Hurry! I can't hold on much longer! My arms are getting numb!" cried Ned.

CHAPTER XX.

THE RESCUE.

As the anxious spectators saw Tutu's throw fall short, they emitted groans of despair but they soon

gave way to cheers as they saw the brave trapper move himself a yard nearer the hole and make a second cast.

Breathlessly they watched the throngs as they sailed through the air—and when they fell full across Ned's hands they shouted with joy!

But the rescue had by no means been accomplished!

So numbed had the New Yorker's hands and arms become that he was powerless to adjust the ropes of walrus hide—or to hold them in a grip tight enough to allow him to be drawn from the water-hole!

"Quick, some of you bring me out another rope!" shouted Tutu.

But though the dog drivers quickly procured one, neither of them would venture out on the ice.

"I'll take it!" exclaimed Helen, turning a face full of scorn upon the faint-hearted men.

"No, you won't!" called back the trapper. "One of you men throw it to me!"

"They'll never be able to do it!" wailed Helen.

But Mara only shouted:

"Get one of the harpoons, boys!"

Instantly the Esquimau sprang to obey.

"Hurry!" yelled the trapper. "Ned's only holding by one hand!"

With the harpoon poised over his shoulder, the taller of the two dog drivers rushed as close to Tutu as he dared go, then drew back his arm, teetered a moment and then hurled the implement which he and his fellows used to spear seals.

With anxious eyes, the men and women watched the harpoon as it cut the air!

But the Esquimau's aim was good and his strength great—and with a clang, the sharp pointed spear struck the ice within a yard of the trapper!

Wild were the cheers which greeted the success of the throw—but they quickly subsided.

"The two of you men grab the end of the rope!" called Tutu. And as the fellows hastened to obey, the trapper tied one of the pieces of walrus thong to the hilt of the harpoon then bound the other tight about his waist and almost before the spectators realized what he intended to do, he began to crawl cautiously but nevertheless rapidly toward the hole.

In breathless suspense, his companions watched his advance.

Less than two feet separated the trapper from the man he was striving so desperately to rescue—but as he raised up, preparatory to making his last effort, Sykes uttered a wail of despair and threw up his hands!

Unable to bear the sight, Helen turned her head.

But the next moment, as cheers resounded, she looked back toward the hole—and, instead of seeing Tutu coming back alone, she beheld him dragging the senseless body of Ned after him!

With a marvellous cleverness, the trapper had leaned forward and seized the hand of the New Yorker just as it had left the ice—after which the work of drawing the body out of the water was but the matter of a few moments.

Yet the danger to the rescued and rescuer was not over!

While the ice had borne the weight of the trapper, the additional heft of Sykes made it give ominously.

"Quick! Haul in on the harpoon rope!" yelled Tutu. And his command was just in time!

As the dog drivers, and the women, aided even by Banta, began to pull in on the stout thong, the ice sank beneath the two men far out on it!

"Keep on pulling! We can save them yet!" shouted the Sightless Wanderer in Esquimau and, understanding, Mara bade Helen redouble her efforts.

With might and main the five hauled—and at last drew Tutu and Ned from the hole and to their feet.

"Brandy, give them brandy—and lots of it!" commanded Banta and from his motions, the women understood what he meant.

CHAPTER XXI.

ADrift ON AN ICE FLOE IN THE FOG.

The powerful stimulant quickly revived the trapper and under his instructions, the dog drivers hastily pitched a tent of furs beneath which Sykes' garb was changed and, after several potions of brandy had been given him, interspersed with vigorous rubbing, he opened his eyes.

"The next time Banta warns you, I hope you will have the sense to heed him!" exclaimed Helen. "Do you realize that Tutu almost lost his life in trying to save you?"

"I'm sorry," murmured Ned.

"Then get up on your pins and run along beside the sleds!" commanded the trapper.

"But I can't! I'm too weak!"

"Either that or die—the choice rests with you! You're so cold that that's the only way to get your circulation working properly again!"

Unwilling to sacrifice his life, the young man got to his feet and, with the aid of one of the sled handles, managed to slip and slide over the ice until he recovered his normal well being.

The striking of the snow rotted ice, while having come so near to causing the death of one of their number and confronting them with new dangers, also brought joy to the little band of intrepid avengers.

After talking with the dog drivers for several minutes, Banta announced:

"We can't be more than two days' march from the frozen island!"

"Then let's make haste and see if we can't get there in one!" exclaimed Helen, excitedly.

"Which is just what we mustn't do," returned the Sightless Wanderer. "Any time now, we may strike the floe ice—and consequently it is necessary for us to proceed slowly and with the utmost caution."

"Tutu, you will walk with me at the head of the dogs. The women and Sykes must stay at the rear of

the sleds, being practically helpless. We'll carry an harpoon with us and plenty of thongs. In case anything happens, we don't want to be caught napping—as we were before."

Quickly were the adjustments made and once more the little party of brave persons set out.

Pausing every now and then to listen, Banta led the way, thumping the ice with his spear butt.

For some five hours had they advanced when he cried:

"There's a crevice ahead! A floe is coming! Tutu, do you and one of the dog drivers go forward and find the crevice."

Without delay, the two men set out and, after travelling about a mile, suddenly paused on the brink of a ridge—below them was clear water!

As he saw it, the Esquimaux began to talk excitedly, waving his hands about like a windmill but to save his soul, the trapper could not make out what he wished to tell him and, with a grunt, turned about and went back to the spot where they had left their companions and the sleds.

But not long after his arrival was he in ignorance of the dog driver's meaning.

Almost before they had come within speaking distance of their friends, the Esquimaux had resumed his excited jabbering and from the actions of the Sightless Wanderer and the other natives of the Arctic regions, the rest could understand that something of tremendous importance to them had been discovered.

"Oh, Tutu, don't let them talk all day! Ask Banta what it is!" exclaimed Helen.

But before the trapper could do so, Mara cried:

"He says if we can follow the passage between the ice, it will take us to the frozen island!"

Never thinking to express wonder that the woman understood what the Esquimaux were talking about, for Ned had refrained from telling of her ability to speak in their language, the others began to ply the trapper with questions which he put to the Sightless Wanderer as rapidly as he could.

"The dog drivers tell me," began Banta, after having waited till he had obtained all the information possible, "that about this time of the year, there is said to be a passage that is open clear to the island."

"It is extremely dangerous to travel, however, because it seems to be a sort of current, like the Gulf Stream, only that it flows with tremendous power and frequently brings down huge pieces of ice which would grind the boat we have—or any other—into match wood."

"It varies in width from scarcely more than a dozen rods, as it was where Tutu and the boy saw it two miles in width—and, curiously, it is in the wider parts that the greatest danger lies. For there is room

enough for two floes to move in the broad expanse—and there is always danger that they will meet!"

And how terrible was this danger, the members of the intrepid band of avengers were soon to learn!

"Then what are we to do? How can we ever reach the frozen island if we can't use our boat?" demanded Helen.

Quickly the trapper put the question to Banta.

"The dog drivers advise going along the ridge as far as possible and then launching the boat from the nearest point to the island we can reach."

"Let's be starting then!" cried the beautiful girl. And without further delay, the sleds were started.

But in their calculations, both the Esquimaux and the Sightless Wanderer were mistaken—as they were soon to find!

Stopping for only brief intervals for sleep and food, sustaining their strength by recourse to liquid stimulants, the little band scurried along the ridge, from time to time one of the Esquimaux going to the summit and reconnoitering.

After one of these trips, the dog driver announced that there was a broad expanse of clear ice extending miles toward the island whose massive ice peaks were barely visible.

Immediately Banta, Mara, the trapper and the two Esquimaux went into council, exchanging opinions as to the advisability of venturing out upon this field instead of taking the longer route along the ridge.

"We know from the piece of bones with the three holes in it that the White Runners have been summoned in conclave—but we don't know how long their orgy will last!" exclaimed Tutu. "For this reason, and I know that I voice the sentiments of Helen and Sykes, I believe that we should brave the danger and get to the island in the least possible time."

More prudent, the dog drivers urged the dangers of the field breaking from its moorings and then splitting up into smaller floes. But the Sightless Wanderer, being on the point of realizing the dream of his long, blind years, in striking the fiends when they would be the least able to defend themselves, drunk as they probably all would be, cast his vote with that of Tutu for taking the hazard and Mara, afire with the hope of being in time to rescue her lover, even though she could never be his wife because of the great social difference between them, decided the question by voting to take their course across the ice field.

When this decision was reached, however, the two Esquimaux declared emphatically that they would not accompany the party farther and it required long argument and finally an entire can of gum-drops to change their minds.

At last, however, the sleds were upon the broad expanse of ice and in the thought that they would soon reach their goal, the men and women forgot their

weariness and trudged along with amazing speed.

About half across the field had they travelled when there suddenly descended upon them that bogie of all Arctic expeditions, fog.

Caused by the shifting of the wind to the south blowing over the snow and ice, it soon becomes nigh impenetrable—and the only wise course, when overtaken by it, is to rest in the spot where the traveller is overtaken by it and wait until the wind shifts.

But though the little band of intrepid avengers halted the moment the fog enveloped them, they were not permitted to remain still!

Helen, Sykes and Tutu together with one of the drivers assembled about the sled which carried the boat while the others took their positions, some two rods away, about the remaining sled.

Now and then the parties exchanged hails but so deceptive was the sense of direction that they dared not attempt to pass from one sled to the other.

Of a sudden, however, Tutu and his companions heard a shout of despair.

"The field has broken!" yelled Banta. "Keep your wits about you! If you ever reach the island remember Banta's wife and daughters!"

Whether the Sightless Wanderer ever uttered further words or not, the little band by the boat did not know for the air was rent with deafening crashes as great pieces of ice, submerged mountains, ground against one another.

"How big do you suppose the piece is on which we are?" asked Helen, her voice trembling with fear.

"Heaven only knows!" exclaimed Tutu. "We can't talk with the dog driver and I've no idea."

Wracked by the thought that they were going to their death when seemingly at the very threshold of victory, the members of the party sat in gloomy silence, each engaged with his own thoughts.

The crashing of the ice was incessant and time and again the piece upon which they were quivered as though it were jelly.

But at last, when they were almost crazed with despair, the fog lifted as suddenly as it came.

Looming stern and awful, yet with marvellous grandeur and the light was reflected from the myriads of ice prisms rose the frozen island—less than a mile ahead of them.

"Can that be it?" murmured Helen, after a silence of several minutes.

"It must be!" returned the trapper. "See how the Esquiman acts."

And turning their eyes to him, the others saw that he was jumping up and down, waving his arms and jabbering wildly.

"Then let's unload the boat and put off just as soon as we possibly can!" exclaimed the beautiful girl, excitedly.

Tutu, however, had been scanning the broad expanse of water about them for some sign of the other members of the party from whom they had been separated by the breaking of the ice field but as far as his eyes could reach, theirs was the only bit of floe to be seen!

"The poor devils must have gone to the bottom!" he murmured. But a sudden cry from the Esquiman drew his mind back to his surroundings.

Looking toward where the fellow was pointing, he beheld a crack in the ice.

"Quick, unload the boat!" the trapper shouted, springing toward the sled. "Throw in some food. We haven't a moment to lose. The floe we're on is beginning to break up!"

With a will the others tugged and hauled at the boat until they had it on the ice, then threw in arms, ammunition and some boxes of food, after which they pushed it to the edge and launched it.

"Tell the Esquiman to get in and come with us!" commanded Helen of the trapper.

But the native of the North refused, pointing back toward the direction of the ridge.

"Well, if he doesn't want to come, he needn't," exclaimed Tutu and holding the boat while Helen and Sykes stepped into it, he quickly followed and soon they were skimming over the water toward the object of their long journey.

As they reached the base of the frozen island, they gazed upward in horror!

CHAPTER XXII.

THE CHAMBER OF HORROR.

Seated in a throne carved from the sheer ice, as though serving the double purpose of silent sentinel and terrible warning to all who should venture near the mysterious haunt of the White Runners was a skeleton, one arm outstretched.

"What's that thing in his hand?" asked Helen, in a whisper, after a silence of several minutes.

"Can't see," returned Tutu. "Sykes, let me take your glasses."

Vigorously was the young man going to protest against giving up the binoculars when he was prevented by the beautiful girl he had escorted from so many miles away in New York.

"Let him take them, Ned. Tutu knows more about things here than you do. He will be able to see if any of the fiends are watching our approach."

Realizing that resistance would be vain, Sykes handed over the binoculars to the trapper.

"That's a key the skeleton's holding in its hand!"

he exclaimed. "Let's get it and find out what it opens—we may need it."

"Are there any of the devils watching us?" asked Ned, before putting foot on the icy shore.

Carefully the trapper swept the walls of ice with the glasses.

"None that I can see," he replied.

"Then let's begin our hunt for the cave as soon as we can!" exclaimed Helen, at the same time getting from the boat.

Picking up their rifles, knives and ammunition and taking several pieces of rope, Tutu followed quickly making fast the boat.

The throne of the grim watchman was but a few feet above the edge of the water and as she stepped ashore, Helen made for it, quickly taking the key from its hand.

In amazement, her companions gazed at her—but before they could voice any objections, she exclaimed: "We have the key from this skeleton hand and we will now solve the horrible mystery!"

For several moments, her two companions stood in silence, then the trapper took the key from her and examined it closely.

"It bears signs of having been used!" he cried, excitedly.

"Then let's find what it unlocks!" exclaimed the girl. And readily her companions gave their assent.

"Where do you suppose the cave is?" asked Sykes.

"We can't find out by standing here and staring about us!" snapped the trapper. "Get busy, both of you, and see if you can find any path leading up the cliff of ice."

But though they searched for more than half an hour for even so much as a spot where they could get a foothold, they failed to find one.

"We've probably struck the wrong side of the island," declared Ned. "I say we go back to the boat and row around it."

"Guess that's the best plan—in fact it seems to be the only thing we can do," returned the trapper. "Come on Helen." And he started toward the boat.

But the beautiful girl refused to go with them.

"It's not for nothing that this skeleton is put on guard here," she exclaimed. "My intuition tells me—"

"Oh, bother your intuition!" snapped Ned. "I suppose it tells you that if Tutu and I try, we can walk right up that wall of ice, finding it give way as we place our hands and feet."

Flushing at the sneer in her companion's tone, Helen turned toward the trapper.

"You'll listen to me, anyhow, won't you, Tutu?" she pleaded.

"Surely."

"Then what I was going to say is this—I believe that the entrance to the cave is somewhere about the throne on which the skeleton is sitting!"

So startling was the suggestion that the trapper merely looked at the girl for an instant—but, heedless of what her companions were doing, Helen had mounted to the throne and, with ruthless hands, pushed the grim watchman to one side, while she poked and pushed with the other.

Of a sudden, she uttered a scream and would have fallen had not the trapper sprung forward just in time to catch her.

As she had given a particularly vicious poke at the block of ice on which the skeleton was sitting, it dropped out of sight!

Carrying the girl in his arms, Tutu approached the throne and peered down into the opening—below him he beheld a broad flight of stairs hewn from the ice.

"Give Helen some brandy, quick!" he commanded of Sykes. And when it had been done, he thrust a revolver into her hands, removing the key which she held.

"Come on! We've found the lair! Be prepared to shoot the instant I give the word—and whatever you see, control yourselves. Sykes, you'd better give Helen your flask. She'll more likely need it than you!"

But the girl spurned the offer.

"I'll wager I can bear what we find better than either of you!" she flashed.

"Then we'll go as we are. Ready, forward!" commanded Tutu.

And, with revolvers raised, ready for any emergency, the brave trio stepped down into the unknown depths of the frozen island.

But had they known it, they need not have been afraid, all the members of the White Runners were helplessly drunk!

At the end of twenty steps, the passageway turned to the left and the little band of avengers paused in mute admiration as they beheld a long corridor cut from the ice, lighted by three hanging lamps whose rays were reflected in countless sparkles.

Gliding forward with all the caution of which he was master, Tutu advanced, after having signified that he wished his companions to wait where they were.

From both sides of the passageway they could see that there were openings—and as the trapper gained the first of these, he paused in amazement, then beckoned to his companions to join him.

Stretched out on the floor which was covered with exquisite rugs lay six men, the flagons standing and lying on their sides proclaiming that they were unconscious from drink.

Waiting only an instant while his companions recovered from the shock, Tutu exclaimed.

"You two stand by with your pistols ready. I'm going to bind the fiends!" And unwinding one of the thongs he carried, he quickly bound it about the nearest man's ankles then drew the rope to his wrists, making the two fast on the same thong.

Four others he served in the same way—but as he approached the fifth and touched his hands the man sat up.

At the sight of the strangers, he blinked, then burst out into a furious jabbering, yelling and shrieking.

But not long did the trapper allow him to sound the alarm.

Picking up a flagon which lay close at hand, he dealt him a terrific blow over the head which effectually silenced him after which Tutu hastily bound him.

"Evidently there are only six of the men here—if there were, they'd be coming in response to those cries!" he exclaimed. "Come on to the next room."

Ere they reached it, however, they were amazed to see several heads peep cautiously from behind the last door on the left.

"Shall we shoot?" asked Ned, raising his revolver.

"No, they're women!" exclaimed Helen.

"Impossible!" snapped Sykes. "I'm going to shoot!"

But before he had the chance so to do, a voice cried:

"The lady is right—we are women, slaves to the devils who call themselves the White Runners."

Gasping in amazement, Helen and Ned looked at one another. But Tutu called:

"Tell us how many of the White Runners there are! I've just bound six of them! We are your friends! We've come to rescue you!"

"There are only seven!" replied the first woman.

"Then we've settled for them all—counting the one we got on the ice!" declared the trapper.

Recovering from the shock of finding any one of her sex in the ice cave, Helen walked down to them.

"Have you seen anything of a man called Wanok who must have been brought here within a few days?" she asked, her eyes big with mingled hope and fear.

"Yes—if you hurry you may save him!"

"Where is he?"

"In the Chamber of Horrors!"

"Where is it?" cried Tutu, hastening forward.

"At the end of the passageway—but you can't get to it without the key."

"Where can I find that?"

"One of the Runners has it."

"Why not try the one we found in the skeleton's hand?" suggested Helen.

Quickly the trapper sprang to do so and as he placed the piece of brass in the hole in the iron door and exerted his strength, he felt it turn!

"Hurrah! I've found it!" he cried. "Come on!"

But as he turned to see what sort of place he had discovered, he staggered back in horror!

In a room which was brilliantly lighted and some thirty feet lower than the level on which he was standing, he beheld the forms of a score of men and women frozen into the ice!

The expressions on their faces were terrible to see—and he turned from the awful sight, as though he would keep the beautiful girl from gazing at it.

But as he did so, an agonized shout reached his ears!

"Who are you?" he called.

"Wanok—Jack Trainer!"

"Where?"

"Under where you are standing, being frozen to death—like the poor devils you see all about!"

Amazed, the trapper dropped to his belly and peered over the edge of the ice.

Standing in the water, which was dropping over him from a narrow slit in the ice, his feet and hands bound by stout steel chains to staples driven into the wall of ice, stood the man for whom the beautiful girl had braved so many dangers.

"Have good courage! We'll release you!" cried Tutu. "Your sister's with me!"

Then he sprang to his feet.

"Helen, keep away! You mustn't look! It's too dreadful! But we're in time to save your brother! Sykes, take the girl back to the women and tie her if necessary to keep her there."

Realizing that it would be useless to protest, Helen allowed herself to be led away while the trapper quickly rigged up a rope and, with the aid of the women, liberated Jack Trainer.

And the mystery of the Arctic Circle was solved.

Eventually all the women were restored to their families and the White Runners were given summary justice the moment they arrived at a white settlement. But of Biram, Shela, Cora and Lamak no trace was found, the Runners declaring that they had been drowned.

Good fortune had favored the others of Helen's party on the floe, which had been driven against the solid ice, and they made their way to an Indian village where they were found by Helen, Tutu, Sykes and Jack—and the daughters of the Sightless Wanderer were restored to him.

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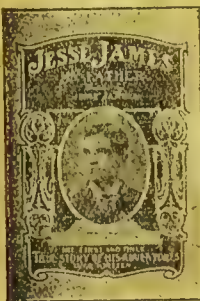
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110. The Twisted Trail; being the sequel to the Mask of Mystery.
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112. The Beautiful Captive; being the continuation of Booth Bell.
113. Booth Bell's Twisted Trail; being the sequel to The Beautiful Captive.
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115. The Banker's Secret; being the sequel to The Wall Street Detective.
116. The Wizard's Trail; or The Mystery of a Lost Casket.
117. The House of Mystery; being the sequel to The Wizard's Trail.
118. Old Sleuth in New York; or Trailing a Great Criminal.
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135. The House of Fear; or The Young Duke's Strange Quest.

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- Feb. 3-136. Foiled by Fate; being the sequel to The House of Fear.
 Feb. 10-137. A Dash for Millions; or Old Ironsides Trail of Mystery.
 Feb. 17-138. The Trail of Three; or The Motor Pirates' Last Stand.
 Feb. 24-139. A Dead Man's Hand; or Caught by his Own Victim.

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| No. 2. | TRACKED TO HIS LAIR | or The Pursuit of the Midnight Raider |
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